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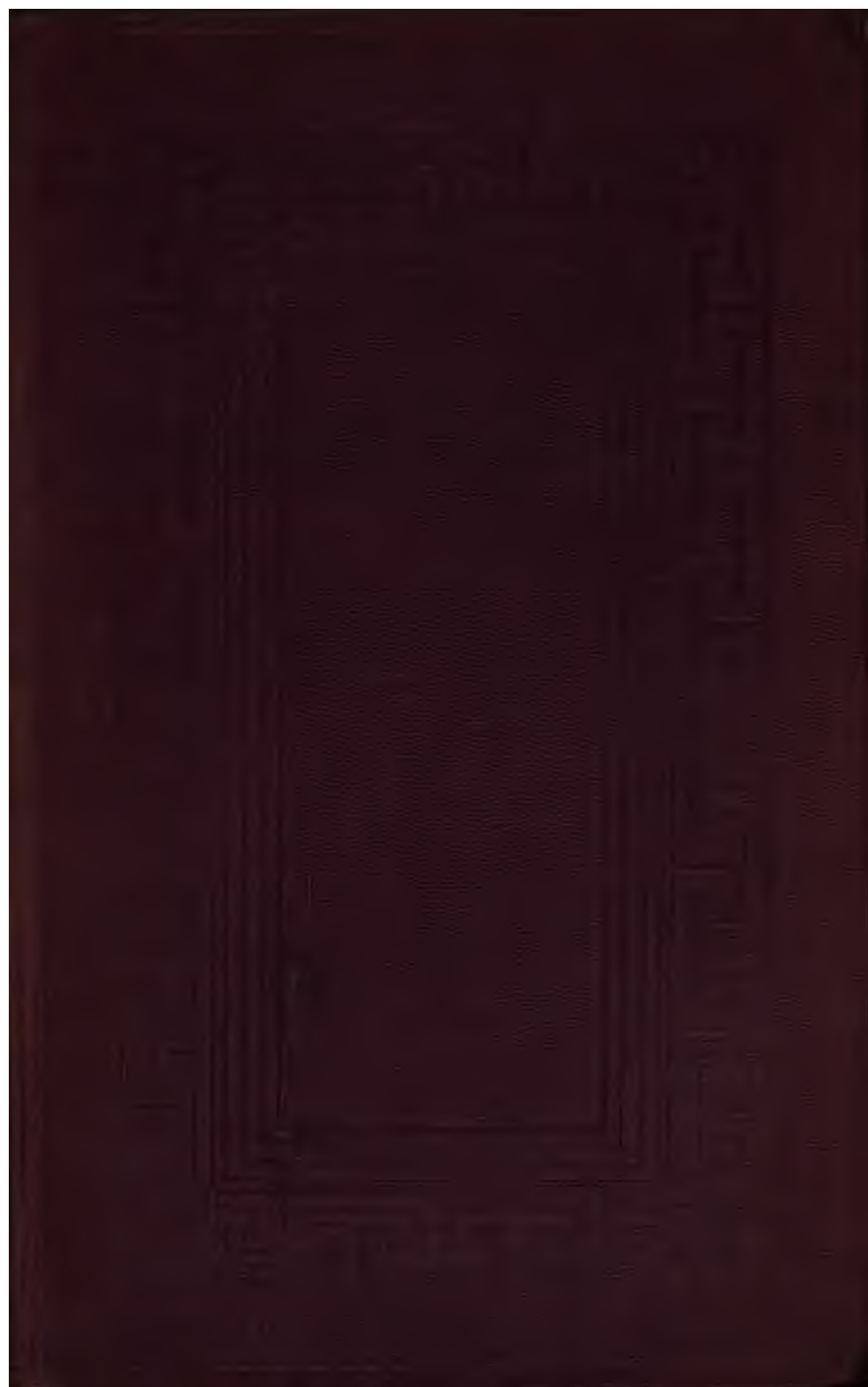
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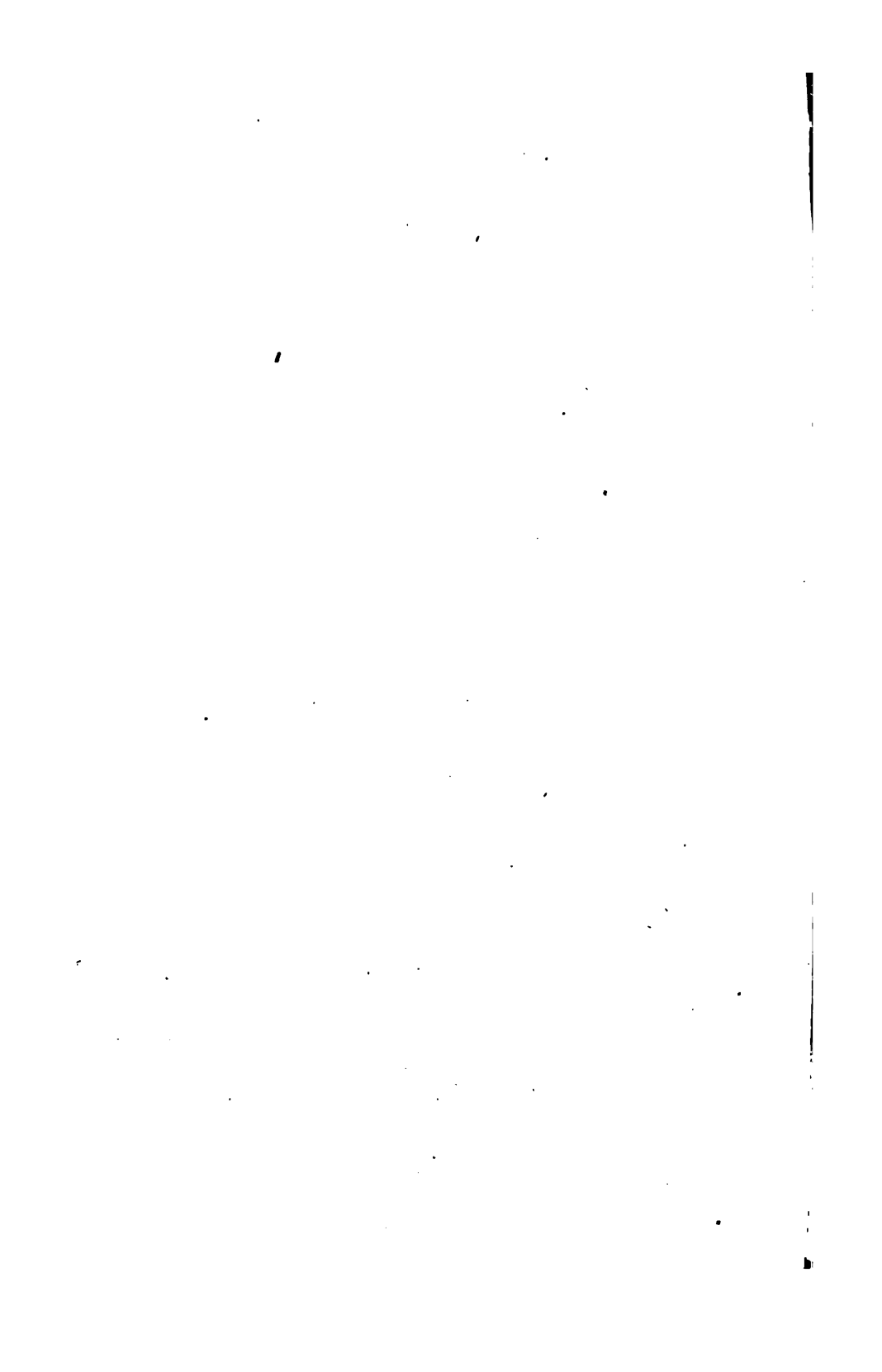




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# THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.

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AUTHOR OF "A STUMBLE ON THE THRESHOLD," "CLAUDE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

"No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them."  
ECCLESIASTES.

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# THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.

## CHAPTER I.

"Sneering nobles, in more polish'd guise,  
Whisper'd the tale, and smil'd upon the lie  
Which made me look like them—a courteous wittol,  
Patient, ay, proud, it may be, of dishonour."

MARINO FALLERO.

FEBRUARY came; Parliament met, and drop by drop, the stream of fashion found its way back to the deserted channel of London. The commencement of the Session, it may be observed, summons to town an immense number of people who have no sort of connection with either branch of the Legislature; and foremost among them arrived Hyacinth Leycester, for whom, its flowers excepted, the country had few charms. He liked an occasional run with fox-hounds, but

was not a sufficiently enthusiastic votarie of the chase to devote to it five days out of every seven, or surrender all other advantages for the sake of living within easy distance of the Quorn or the Atherston packs. As soon therefore, as custom sanctioned the movement, he gladly returned to his old haunts, and established his head-quarters in Park Lane.

Mrs. Bathurst hailed his advent with a feverish kind of exultation. Her days were divided between a restless hankering after his society, and self-reproach for the pleasure she took in it; a pleasure she no longer attempted to disguise from herself, though she would not admit the danger with which it was fraught. She thought that with proper precautions edged tools might be played with; she had seen it done, and did not stop to reflect how many wounds must be received and healed before a juggler—more especially a female juggler—can acquire that rare amount of dexterity. There was no reason why every moth should be debarred from approaching the flame of a candle because some were so silly or so unfortunate as to burn their wings, lingering out a crippled existence, or dying in cruel agony. In plain words, Laura

did nothing to discourage Hyacinth's assiduities, and as he had no other intrigue on his hands just then, his sleek chestnut might be seen almost daily perambulating Montagu Square for an hour together, while he was paying those long-delicious visits, during which so much occurs to remember, so little to record.

Vague hints reached Mr. Bathurst's ears of the way in which his wife's solitude was consoled, and an equally vague uneasiness on the subject took possession of him. His first impulse was to decree the absolute exclusion of the serpent from his Eden; but this summary course would not only have implied a distrust of his Eve's steadiness—which she would assuredly have resented after the fashion of her prototype—but also have been attended with an amount of public scandal, which the first Adam had happily no occasion to dread. Yet just as he had convinced himself of the impossibility of forbidding Leycester the house, he was smitten with dismay at the recollection of his own imprudence in leaving Laura behind him in the lion's very den.

With more bitterness than before did he now recall his supposed rival's personal advantages;

and the more contempt he felt for Hyacinth's frivolity, and presumed deficiency of intellect, the greater was his annoyance at seeing his honour threatened by "such an insect." Had the disturber of his peace been a learned doctor or even a tremendous warrior, there would have been some dignity in the disturbance; but a mere dandy! it was too provoking.

His suspicions once roused, he became sensible of an alteration in his wife's manner towards him; not in her conduct, that continued much as before, but in the spirit which influences it—a subtle distinction which he had only lately learnt to draw. The cold, smooth surface of duty had hitherto sufficed him, now he looked curiously beneath and found a hollow space—or still worse, a space his image did not fill. For Laura wanted the stage craft to heighten by artificial means the colour of her feelings. She had never professed to love her husband, not attaching, indeed, any definite meaning to the word; but as far as respect and submission were concerned, she honestly gave him of her best. In an evil hour

Knowledge came  
Upon her soul, like a flame.

She discovered at the same moment that the fruit of the tree was fair, and that it was forbidden. Oppressed with a sense of moral infidelity to vows which were none the less binding because partly contracted in ignorance, she could no longer serenely tender homage which now savoured of hypocrisy, and thus visibly cooled in her allegiance, just as her lord began to question its value.

The flirtation sat far less heavily upon Mr. Leicester's conscience. Gentlemen, in the first place, are always less scrupulous about such derelictions from conjugal propriety; and Hyacinth's education had not been such as to impress him with peculiarly strict notions on that head. His mind was retentive enough of such principles as had been engrafted thereupon, witness his careful avoidance of debt, and firm resistance of the many temptations to dubious pecuniary transactions which beset young men, whose income is not equal to their expenditure; witness also his steady adherence to such imperfect views of Sabbath observance, as he had acquired by early and almost exclusive association with the devouter sex. Had respect for his neighbour's wife been as rigidly inculca

cated as regard for his tradesmen's pockets, he would probably have been no greater terror to husbands than to his creditors. But on this point no adequate stress had been laid. In the society with which he mixed, he not only found such offences very leniently treated, but perceived that a reputation for successful gallantry was one of the most coveted feathers a man could set in his cap. The stimulus of public, if covert, applause was scarcely needed to impel the handsome lad into a course of adventure, to which his disposition was but too prone, and he certainly prospered in it to his heart's content, preserving, however, in the midst of his aberrations, some dim line of right and wrong, his hesitation to transgress which produced the apparent inconsistencies noted by Mrs. Fitzmaurice and others. For instance, whatever might have been his relations with that lady, nothing would have induced him to take advantage of the evident admiration entertained for him by poor Miss Broadwood, his sister's pretty governess; nor was he capable of deliberately undermining any woman's virtue, but if the door was left ajar, he thought it no sin to push it open wide enough to admit himself.

An innocent young matron in Mrs. Bathurst's rank of life was the class of game which he did not usually allow himself to pursue; a sort of coquettish defiance in her manner had originally drawn him into a contest from which vanity forbade him to retire unglorified, but he fought for the sake of victory only. His seductive arts were employed to inspire a sentiment he was not in the least inclined to share; no tender weakness agitated his breast, no desire to convert a holiday joust into a combat a *l'outrance*. That was to him a mere trial of skill, which might prove to his antagonist a matter of life and death.

Ponder it well, O ye fond erring women, trembling on the verge of crime; it is for such false gods as these ye abandon your first faith, and forfeit your hopes of heaven.

In the meanwhile, undisturbed by any self-upbraidings, he spent his afternoons in Mrs. Bathurst's drawing-room, and if, instead of gadding elsewhere in the evening, he fell asleep on the sofa in Mrs. Leycester's, he considered himself a most virtuous and exemplary husband, an opinion with which, judging from many a fond glance over the top of her book, many a



kiss softly pressed on his unconscious eyelids, Mrs. Leycester was fully disposed to coincide.

The Opera was just open; Mrs. Bathurst had gone with some friends, Mr. Bathurst sat moodily by the fire at the Carlton pondering over the means of breaking off the intimacy to which he attributed his wife's increasing predilection for gaiety of all kinds. Was that puppy Leycester of the party to-night? he wondered. It had not been so stated, but that might have been to disarm his opposition to the scheme. He was half-inclined to go and ascertain the fact for himself. What o'clock was it? Not yet half-past ten. He was on the point of rising, when his attention was arrested by a remark from one of the few occupants of the room, and he remained rooted to the spot.

"And so you don't think much of Cinthy's new Sultana—not Laura Bell, but belle Laura," said the voice.

"She's pretty enough," was the reply, "but not startling, and after Queen Constance!"

"There lies the charm, my dear fellow; Queen Constance, I fancy, was a most imperious mistress, while the present favourite is no doubt intensely flattered by his highness's notice."

"Few women are seriously displeased with admiration," rejoined the second speaker. "But is Leycester really a happy man, do you suppose?"

"That is more than I can undertake to say; he's so precious deep, there's no getting a word out of him about these little transactions, but I should think he was very unlikely to sue in vain; he has never failed yet, I believe."

Pleasant hearing, this, for an anxious husband!

"They say his own wife is in love with him," added another, in a tone of half-incredulous astonishment.

"There's a great deal of fashion in these things," remarked a fourth. "Women are prone to run after a particular man, as they do after a particular bonnet, or trimming. But to give master Hyacinth his due, he goes about the business in a very gentlemanlike way, raising no scandal, and telling no tales."

"Doesn't it strike you, though, that the irresistible Cinthy was rash to meddle with a lawyer's property?"

"He may come in for an action for damages, you think? What fun it would be! How an

injured man, however, can be such a fool as to bring his grievances into court for the public edification, is more than I can conceive."

"What would you do then, in such a case as you have lately supposed? Put a bullet into him at once?"

"Devil a bit," was the prompt reply; "setting aside the chance of getting shot yourself, that process is scarcely less inconvenient than the other. You have all the newspapers down upon you just the same, all the clubs in full cry, besides inquests, warrants, and a trial for murder, or a precipitate flight to Boulogne. No; of the three evils, patience is the least."

Mr. Bathurst heard no more; what he had heard dwelt on his ear but vaguely, like the utterances of a dream. Had it then come to this? While he was deliberating about strengthening his defences, had the enemy already stolen into the citadel, and left him nothing to defend? Her name thus boldly coupled with a paramour, whose power was shamelessly vaunted by his companions; himself, a mark for scorn and obloquy to a dissolute throng, incapable even of appreciating his honest indignation; was vengeance indeed his sole remaining hope? He

thought not of turning upon the group of scandalmongers, and demanding on what specific grounds they based the calumny; they had mentioned no proofs, yet spoke with a confidence which did but confirm his own suspicions. He was not the man to bear "the brunt of evil reports with such gravity, calmness, and apparent unconsciousness, that they would die away, or pass lightly over." Far from "taking his own part against the world," (to use the expression of an eminent living writer), he "made common cause with the world against himself," and yielded blindly to all the jealous fury of Othello.

He had risen from his seat, with no more definite purpose than to go somewhere and do something, when who should enter the apartment but Hyacinth himself, looking more than usually brilliant. Bestowing a careless nod upon Mr. Bathurst, he joined the group of whose conversation he had been lately the subject.

"Well, Leycester, you have not sat long at dinner. How did it go off?" began one of the party.

"It was a splendid affair: I was never so bored in my life," answered he, rather enigmatically.

"How do you mean?" asked Dacre.

"Why, I mean," replied Hyacinth, after a lengthened yawn, "that everything was overwhelmingly sumptuous. The wine was the very oldest, the ice the most intensely cold, the fruit most unattainably scarce, that were ever eaten and drunk. Where you generally see silver, we had gold; where one wax-light, we had a dozen; we only wanted a point-lace table-cloth to complete the display. In short you were obtrusively kept in perpetual remembrance of the fact, that your host possessed twenty thousand a year; and I shouldn't wonder if all the guests had twenty thousand a year too; they were quite stupid enough."

"You hold that a man's brains increase in inverse proportion to his riches?" said the wealthy Sinclair,

"Something in that way," rejoined Hyacinth saucily. "At least, I never knew a man worth much money, who was worth much else."

"You have not told us yet who these dull millionaires were," said Dacre.

"Oh! people one never hears of; I don't recollect one of their names, in the first place; and if I did, I couldn't stop to enumerate them. I

only looked in to see if Lawrance were here, on my way to Her Majesty's."

"Where, no doubt, you are anxiously expected," remarked Sinclair significantly. "I went in for an hour, and Lawrance, whom I left there, showed me. . . ."

"Oh! Lawrance is at the theatre already, is he?" interrupted Hyacinth, with an admonitory glance in the direction of the fire-place. "You don't frequent these places, I believe, Mr. Bathurst," he added, turning to that gentleman, who had just quitted his station on the rug. He made the observation merely to acquaint his companions with the silent by-stander's name; Mr. Bathurst read in it a desire to ascertain the chances of interruption during the expected *tête-à-tête*.

"I mean to go to-night," he answered with a savage glance.

"Can I give you a lift then?" said Hyacinth who was inspecting himself in the glass before starting, and lost the look.

The unembarrassed rejoinder might have lulled suspicion, but Mr. Bathurst fancied he saw a sign of intelligence pass round the circle of listeners, and, all his ire re-kindling, he hoarsely

muttered some reply, which Leycester interpreted as a refusal, and not a very courteous one. With an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, he turned away saying, "Well, I must be off, or I shall not catch a glimpse of. . . ."

"Of whom, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Bathurst, suddenly confronting him, and barring his path to the door. "I demand an answer," he continued vehemently, as Hyacinth, elevating his eyebrows, attempted to pass him without further notice.

The young man was not of a choleric disposition, and had no wish to quarrel with Mr. Bathurst, of all men. Shaking off, therefore, the hand put out to detain him, he replied with tolerable patience, "I really don't see what concern it is of yours, what right you have to question me; but as you seem so curious on the subject, you are welcome to know that I have an appointment with my friend, Captain Lawrence, which, with your permission, I will proceed to keep."

"A paltry equivocation!" cried Mr. Bathurst, whose irritation seemed to be increased by the other's coolness, and by the consciousness of

affording a spectacle to the other persons present. "You know very well that it is no male acquaintance by whom your coming is anxiously expected."

"This is too much, sir," interrupted Hyacinth, beginning to chafe. "You forget yourself strangely. Stand out of my way at once, and do not compel me to use violence towards one so much my senior."

"Your senior,—yes, I understand the taunt," retorted Mr. Bathurst, losing all self-control; "but old as I may be, I am not blind, nor deaf, nor do I boast the *patience* that looks silently on at its own dishonour. I will exact retribution, not in purse, as your worthless tribe imagine, but in person, for the foul wrong I have suffered at your hands, and teach you henceforth to confine your intrigues to the unprincipled class from which you are sprung."

"Whatever injuries you imagine yourself to have received," said Leycester, as soon as he could put in a word, "I cannot think you consult your own dignity, or—or any one else's in choosing so public a place for their discussion. However, as you have elected this tribunal, I will not refuse to plead. Allow me, then, to



exercise the strictly legal right of enquiring on what basis you found the grave charge which, as I dimly gather from your intemperate speech, you bring against me?"

"Ask your friends, yonder," replied Mr. Bathurst, shortly. "They are my authorities."

Hyacinth turned sharply round. "If any one," he said, "has imputed to me conduct inconsistent with the profoundest respect for the lady whose discretion has been so unwarrantably assailed, he has stated that which is false,—though it does not necessarily follow that he has wilfully perverted the truth," was the courteous reservation.

"Upon my soul, my dear Leycester," said Dacre, in answer to this appeal, "this irascible gentleman seems to have shared the common fate of eavesdroppers, and heard more than was agreeable to himself: but I cannot discern any logical sequence in the conclusions he has drawn from our disjointed talk. No names were mentioned by us, except, indeed, that of a fair one whose reputation Mr. Bathurst is in no way called upon to defend: while as to yourself, I do not recollect that we said anything worse of

you, than that you were a very fascinating fellow, and committed great havoc among the sex in general."

"You hear, sir?" said Hyacinth, with a slight touch of sarcasm in his tone. "You surely do not intend to hold me responsible for all the nonsense of this kind my friends may think fit to utter."

"My own ears," persisted Mr. Bathurst, "furnished me with a more faithful report of the recent conversation than your informant has given you; but my complaint does not rest solely upon such testimony, valuable as it is. It scarcely required that, to convince me that you have been long playing a perfidious game, stealthily undermining the honour of a house into which you were incautiously admitted as a guest. Such a course is no doubt perfectly in accordance with your loose system of morals; but I am unfortunately not well bred enough to accept the part you would assign to me."

"What is it you require of me?" asked Leicester, more cordially; "that I should cease to visit at your abode? I am ready to give you that, or any other satisfaction in my power."

A lurid glance shot from Mr. Bathurst's eyes

as he replied in a low concentrated whisper: "It is too late for such half-measures, there is but one satisfaction you can now afford me."

"Angels preserve me!" ejaculated Hyacinth, starting back a pace or two, with a half comic air of bewilderment; "you don't mean to say you expect me to fight you!" And the native hilarity—perhaps, under the circumstances, we should say, levity—of his disposition found vent in a hearty peal of laughter. Stung by a fancied stress on the personal pronouns, Mr. Bathurst retorted sharply:

"Do you perceive any obstacle to the meeting, sir, in our relative positions?"

"I am not so arrogant," answered Leycester, recovering his gravity. "Why do you persist in attributing to me a vulgar notion of superiority, which nothing, I am sure, in my demeanour can at any time have warranted? No, if I decline a hostile encounter, it is because I deem the ground of offence wholly insufficient to justify such a proceeding. You bring against me a very serious accusation: I give it an unqualified denial. You reiterate it, with an amount of invective that would drive a more irritable person mad: I overlook this provoca-

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tion, in consideration of your excited state. In return for my forbearance, you fling a challenge in my teeth, to accept which would be almost to admit the justice of your claim upon my life. Besides, sir, have you considered the frightful scandal that would be caused by such an event? the stigma of notoriety, inevitably attached to the lady, however innocent. . . .”

“Say no more, sir,” interrupted Mr. Bathurst, “unless you would have me imagine that a regard for your own safety mingles with this generous solicitude for the credit of others. Instead of citing you to a court of justice—”

“Where you know very well your case would fall to the ground,” interposed Hyacinth scornfully.

“Instead of invoking against you the penalties of the law,” continued Mr. Bathurst, “I seek the redress society provides for the incensed husband. Refuse it me, and I proclaim you dastard as well as profligate.”

For a few seconds Hyacinth was speechless, as though some one had struck him a violent blow on the chest. When he spoke, however, it was with nearly all his wonted *sang froid*, though a slight tremor in his voice betokened suppressed emotion.

"I call you to witness, gentlemen, that this quarrel is not of my seeking. I have borne much from this man, believing him not quite master of himself, and for the sake of one whose helplessness should always make her interests dearer to us than our own; but since he has permitted himself language which no gentleman hears unmoved, and since we cannot much longer retain undisturbed possession of this apartment," he added rapidly, footsteps being audible on the stairs, "any further communication between us must be made by deputy. May I trouble you, Dacre, to act on my behalf?" Receiving an assent, he took up his hat, saying, "Good night then; I shall be in time for the ballet yet."

Mr. Bathurst stared at him in astonishment. "After all that has passed," he stammered, "you still persist in going—"

"Is the fellow quite an idiot?" exclaimed Leycester, with a sudden fierceness of look and gesture that contrasted strangely with his late composure. "Does he suppose that I am to alter my plans in deference to his absurd caprices?"

"I will follow you."

"Follow and—" Hyacinth's set teeth intercepted the rest of the sentence.

"Cinthy's in for a duel at last," remarked one of the chorus, as soon as the door closed.

"Do him a vast deal of good; he wanted taking down a peg," observed Sinclair.

"I am very glad he didn't ask me to be his second," said Major O'Hara. "From his manifest reluctance to accept the challenge, and his general effeminacy, I should augur nothing brilliant from his conduct in the field."

"The augury shows no great insight into character," was Dacre's pithy comment. "A white hand is no indication of a white liver. Sir Charles Coldstream is a match for any blacksmith when once his blood is up."

Mr. Bathurst had called a cab, and driven rapidly after his opponent to the Opera-house, where he was refused admission, not being in evening dress. Greatly annoyed at this repulse, and unwilling to quit the spot without some elucidation of his doubts, he resolved to await the close of the performance, and ascertain whether the objectionable cavalier was or was not in attendance upon his wife. The company quickly began to disperse, and among the first came

Hyacinth Leycester with a lady on his arm. Her hood concealed her face, but a second glance at her tall figure convinced the agitated observer that it could not be Laura. They paused so close to his hiding-place, that he heard the lady say: "The day after to-morrow, then, I may reckon on you."

"The day after to-morrow," repeated Leycester thoughtfully, "I cannot tell where I may be."

"That is so like you, Cinthy," exclaimed his companion petulantly; "you love to enhance the value of your society by making it a matter of difficulty to secure it. Please yourself, however; don't come if it be disagreeable to you."

"Would you care, I wonder, if I never came again?" said Hyacinth, in a tone so different from any Mr. Bathurst had ever heard him use, that he started with surprise, as at a new proof of the enchanter's skill.

Before any reply could be made to the query, a shout of "Mrs. Fitmaurice's carriage!" arose from the hall, and the couple hurried down, followed at a safe distance by Mr. Bathurst, who, having seen Hyacinth drive away, returned home in a rather more composed frame of mind.

## CHAPTER II.

"Da sternere corpus  
Semiviri Phrygis, et fedare in pulvere crines,  
Vibratos calido ferro, myrrhæque madentes"

VIRGIL.

"Then was the cordial pour'd.....

.....and the fair arm

Rais'd higher the faint head which o'er it hung ;

[She] watch'd with eagerness each throb that drew

A sigh from his heaved bosom—and hers, too."

BYRON.

It was later than usual when Laura came down to breakfast the next morning; yet she was hardly prepared to find her husband's meal entirely finished, and the room tenantless. To this cause she attributed the gloom on his brow when he looked in hat in hand, before leaving the house. Her apologies were met by the remark:

"You can fix your own hour for dinner; I shall not dine at home."

"That happens rather fortunately," said Laura cheerfully; "for I am going to Windsor with the Leycesters, and one never knows when one may get back."



Mr. Bathurst repeated the name with an emphatic addition that alarmed his wife. "I desire you make no engagements without consulting me," he broke out. "I don't choose to have you always gadding about with those people. Write and say you cannot go."

"My dear William, it will look so odd at the last moment! What excuse can I give?"

"That I leave to your fertile imagination. Ladies of fashion can at any time plead a headache, I suppose."

Laura dared not argue the point. After the angry mention of the Leycesters, she was afraid of seeming too eager for their society, and judged it prudent to provoke no altercation on the subject. So, at least Mr. Bathurst interpreted her silence. Accustomed as he had been to her demure compliance with his wishes, he yet carried away the impression that she would not so quietly have acquiesced in his somewhat harsh prohibition, had she not been guiltily conscious of its motive.

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"I have called for my instructions," said

Dacre, as he marched into Hyacinth's private apartment that same morning. "Is it to be understood that old Bathurst calls you out for making yourself too much at home in his establishment, or that you call him out for describing the liberty in terms more energetic than polite. Am I to be defiant or conciliatory, apologetic or inexorable?"

The young man paced the room with an air of undissembled vexation. "I am not afraid of telling you, Dacre, that I would give a great deal to be out of this infernal scrape. What evil spirit possessed me to entangle myself among these antiquated precisians, who think a *tête-à-tête* sacrilege, a soft speech blasphemy! However, to business. In the first place, then, I have not wronged this old fellow. You smile, but it is true. Had I done him the injury he suspects, I should not have hesitated to grant him the poor satisfaction of taking a shot at me. Being innocent, I am certainly unwilling to incur either the risk or the odium. If, therefore, in the interval that has elapsed, he should have come round to more correct views, you will shew yourself open to

persuasion, and exact merely such excuses as shall save my dignity."

"And if he should not prove so reasonable, but persist in his—error?"

"Then you are empowered to accede to his sanguinary proposal, and settle all needful preliminaries of time, place, &c."

"Now, let me see if I comprehend my mission," said Dacre. "For various motives, not necessary to recapitulate, you don't want to fight."

"Decidedly not."

"You authorise me to declare that there is no substantial cause why you should."

"I pledge you my word."

"You require that Bathurst should withdraw his offensive expressions, uttered, you are willing to hope, under a misconception."

"Precisely."

"And if he do not frankly and fully respond to the appeal, you will meet him on his own terms"

"Dixisti."

"Very good," said Dacre, rising; "I will now go and meet the enemy's ambassador. There is nothing more to be said, I believe."

"Nothing that I remember. Stop though,—

hallo, Dacre! one condition I must lay upon you."

"Well?"

"For mercy's sake, don't take us where there are any cock pheasants."

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The long day passed drearily in Montagu Square; Laura's disappointment about the expedition to Windsor was the least of her troubles. It might have been the reaction that follows a night of excitement that depressed her spirits, but certainly a dim foreboding of evil hung over her. The harshness with which her usually impassive husband had promulgated his arbitrary decree; the rough way in which he had repulsed her offer to assist him on with his coat, though nothing had visibly occurred to put him out of humour, combined with many trifling signs of discontent he had lately manifested, to convince her that a storm was impending. He must have discovered her hidden penchant, and had no doubt determined to break off at once the dangerous intimacy. Shame and terror at the idea of being suspected, and not altogether un-

warrantably, by her husband, whose strict notions she knew, and had often professed to share, mingled strangely in her heart with acute regret at the prospect of exclusion from the charmed circle into which she had recently found her way.

"Theoretically," says the clear-sighted author of *Nathalie*, "love may be all the gold of devotion; practically, it is alloyed with the meaner metal of other passions." Now, a desire to rise in the world was the meaner metal which alloyed the sterling sentiment Laura had conceived for Hyacinth Leycester. We do not say there was no gold in the coin, that she had no personal regard for himself; we do not imply that she was aware of the mixture, but it is extremely probable that had he, with all his allurements, presented himself to her in the guise of a bank clerk or a railway engineer, he would have won nothing from her but a calm verdict of approval. It was the halo of fashion about him that fascinated her; his attentions had flattered her vanity, while the subtle atmosphere he diffused around him penetrated her heart.

It appears to be necessary to the conquest of a woman that her lover should be superior to

her in something—it does not much matter what; without some such point of vantage, the victory is ever insecure. Woman's love (to borrow again from Miss Kavanagh), is essentially idolatry. The step or two that Hyacinth stood above Mrs. Bathurst in the social scale, just gave her room to fall down and worship him.

If this admixture of petty ambition to be gratified through his means, did not add dignity to the feeling with which he had inspired her, it in some degree diminished its danger. Laura's soul was not yet stirred to its inmost depths by the mighty wind of passion, though there was a sensible ruffling of the surface, a restless swell of the wave. She found herself unable to contemplate without a shudder the withdrawal of that bright presence which had irradiated the dull monotony of her former life, and shrank from probing more deeply the causes of her disquiet. Hence, she came to no thorough understanding with herself on the subject, and was neither startled into penitence, nor confirmed in sin. She did not boldly say to herself, "this man's image darkens my hearth, I must banish it thence;" nor even, "I love this

man, and will abide the consequences;"—"I must be more circumspect," was the sum of her meditations. Dissatisfied with herself, uncheered by anything around her, and unwilling to risk an explanation with her husband in his present unconciliatory mood, she retired early to rest, without awaiting his return, happily ignorant that by that hour, the final arrangements were completed for a meeting that must cast a slur upon her fame, and might leave upon her conscience the ineffaceable stain of blood.

Mr. Bathurst had proved inaccessible to argument; pistols, Dacre reported, were the only resource.

The morrow dawned, grey and bleak, as he and his principal drove out of town; Hyacinth shivering in his great coat, and pathetically anticipating that most undignified and unbecoming of maladies, a cold in the head.

"What a confounded farce all this is," he grumbled, when, leaving the carriage, they proceeded on foot to the appointed spot, over damp grass; "bringing two men out of their beds at this uncomfortable hour in the morning, to pop at one another with blank cartridge, like soldiers at a sham fight! Why pitch-and-toss would

be an exciting game compared with such manslaughter as this!" -

"Better a farce than a tragedy, any how," replied Dacre; "I hope you have no murderous intentions."

"Murderous! no; but it would serve the fellow right to do him some small mischief, just to break him of the habit of calling people up—out, I mean—on slight pretences. Suppose I were to send a bullet clean through his hat, to show how easily I could have made it the head, if I had been spitefully disposed? By the bye, Dacre," continued Leycester, turning suddenly to his friend, "do you suppose he ever had his finger on a trigger before?"

"I should imagine him at least as good a shot as yourself, *mon cher*. He is a keen sportsman, and spent two hours at a shooting-gallery yesterday."

"So much the better," said Hyacinth, carelessly. "The chances, then, are equal. Here they come; are we to wish them good morning?"

"Your lazy opponent is first on the ground," said Mr. Bathurst's second, Capt. Sandford, "and dressed as if for the park."

"The ruling passion!" sneered Bathurst,



whose haggard look and disordered attire told of a night not devoted to repose. "He would like to make an elegant corpse."

"Good heavens, Bathurst!" cried the other, struck by his savage expression; "you don't surely mean to convert this conventional form into a stern reality?"

"I mean," answered Mr. Bathurst, very deliberately, "not, if I can help it, to destroy his insignificant existence, but to inflict such injury as will mar his much-prized beauty. Death, which I dare say he has pluck enough to meet without shrinking, would be a poor revenge compared to the perpetual mortification I would doom him to endure."

"By Jove!" was the all-comprehensive exclamation of the professional manslayer at this display of civilian animosity. "The loss of a limb, I fear, would hardly answer your purpose," he continued, rather sarcastically; "it will only render the sufferer more interesting; you should have tried vitriol."

The seconds held a short conference together, then separated to arm the opponents.

"I tell you what, Dacre," said Hyacinth, rising from the heap of stones on which he had

seated himself, and flinging away his half-smoked cigar; "the enemy looks decidedly vicious, I begin to think I shall come to grief."

"Accidents, of course, will happen," observed Dacre, fixing a keen cold glance upon his companion's face.

"It will be a great pity," said Hyacinth, pensively. "Society will have a heavy loss."

"Society will console itself," said the cynical Dacre; "Mrs. Fitzmaurice will not put off her party to-night."

"My poor Anna!" murmured Hyacinth, evidently pursuing the train of his own thoughts. "Break the news to her gently, Dacre, and don't let her think me false. I believe that woman loves me."

"Come, come, Cinthy, don't grow sentimental! You married men are always thinking of your wives at the wrong moment. Have you any other charge to give me?"

"Keep my effigies out of the *Illustrated London News*," replied Leycester, shaking off his momentary depression; "justice could not be done me in a wood-cut."

The signal was given: Leycester aimed at a white spot on the trunk of a tree, and hit it;

what Bathurst aimed at is uncertain, but his ball struck his antagonist on the left breast, close to the shoulder. The young man staggered and fell; all three accomplices hastened to his aid.

"For God's sake speak, sir!" cried Capt. Sandford, kneeling down by his side.

Hyacinth looked up and met his enemy's anxious gaze. "It was all fair, Bathurst," he said, feebly, stretching out his hand; "but if it be my last word, I have not wronged you."

His fading lips had scarcely pronounced the concluding syllables, before he fainted. There was a tone of sincerity about this declaration, which produced a powerful effect upon Mr. Bathurst's mind. He could scarcely refuse to credit those faltering accents, spoken in the near view of death, while his vindictive schemes, so lately expressed, melted away before even their partial realization. He had threatened to blast a form of God's making, because it was too fair; yet recoiled with horror from the sight of that graceful young head prostrate in the dust, that oozing blood, that awful calm. No consideration for his personal safety could induce him to quit the place

until he had helped to convey the wounded man to the nearest shelter, and heard a surgeon's positive assurance that the hurt was superficial, and by no means of a character to inspire alarm. Inexpressibly relieved, and feeling that the present was no time for explanations, he then returned boldly to London.

Dacre deemed it more prudent to keep out of the way till he saw how matters went. Sandford remained in charge of the patient, and some hours after accompanied him back to town.

"Do you risk nothing by this course?" asked Hyacinth, when they parted with expressions of mutual regard.

"Very little," replied the Captain. "Our secret has been well kept, and should any ill-consequences ensue, I had as lief be tried for my complicity in a court of law, as by a court martial for being absent without leave."

After the first shock, Hyacinth was disposed to make very light of his wound, and talked of showing himself in public to disprove any exaggerated reports; but the importance of a few days' quiet was so strongly urged upon him, that he consented to abandon the idea. Later in the day, some twinges of pain testified to the

soundness of the advice; while the gloomy state of the atmosphere reconciled him to his confinement. He was lying on a sofa by the fire in his dressing room, towards dusk, revolving the occurrences of the morning, and congratulating himself on the probability of their not reaching the ears of Mrs. Leycester, or gaining a great deal of éclat, when his valet entered, and announced that "a person wished particularly to speak with him."

"What does he want?" enquired Hyacinth. "I can't be teased just now."

"I said, sir, I was pretty sure you would not admit any one, but she was so very anxious."

"She!" repeated Leycester; "then it is a female? And pray what sort of a person is she?"

"Why, sir, it is not very easy to tell. She is rather shabbily dressed, with a thick veil over her face; and she rang the servant's bell; yet somehow, I fancy—"

"Ah! precisely," interposed Hyacinth, cutting short Anderson's conjectures, but plunged in a sea of his own. "A petition, no doubt. Well, show her in, Anderson; stay a minute, though."

He rose, drew the folds of his chocolate satin *robe de chambre* more closely round him, and assured himself by a glance at the mirror that everything about him was correct, before he declared his readiness to receive the stranger.

"Pray be seated, and let me know your errand," he said courteously, advancing a step or two to meet his mysterious visitor, who was evidently labouring under the most painful embarrassment. Suddenly he started back, exclaiming in a tone of mingled surprise and consternation: "Gracious Heaven! Mrs. Bathurst!"

It was indeed Laura, who, lighting accidentally upon a letter intended by her husband to reach her hands only in the event of his death, had at one fell stroke become aware of the extent of his jealousy, and of his meditated vengeance. In her distraction, she scarcely knew what prayers to utter, what wishes to form. To have him brought back a lifeless corpse, was a prospect too terrible to be contemplated; yet to see him enter, stained with Hyacinth's blood, the house which thenceforth could be no home for her, appeared no less fearful an alternative. While supported by all the confi-

quiry as to her husband. Catching at the clue, Hyacinth hastened to reassure her, expressing regret and astonishment that Bathurst should have allowed her to acquire any knowledge of the misunderstanding which had unfortunately arisen between them.

Laura shook her head mournfully. "I appreciate," she said, "the motive which prompts you to represent it as a mere after-dinner fracas; but the letter I found on my husband's desk leaves me no doubt as to the cause of the late deplorable encounter."

"Confound the fellow! couldn't he have waited till after the event?" thought Leicester; but he said with a penitent face: "I could certainly have wished to keep you in ignorance of an affront, to which some imprudence, I fear, on my part has subjected you. I need scarcely say how grieved I am that you should have suffered even an hour's annoyance through my means; Mr. Bathurst, whose susceptibility demonstrates the value he sets upon his treasure, is now, I believe, convinced of the utter groundlessness of his suspicions."

Laura looked incredulous. "By nine o'clock this morning," she said slowly, "you affirm that

he parted from you unhurt. If this be so, why is he still absent from his home?"

"The plea of business might be a true one," suggested Hyacinth, "or he might wish to compose and collect his thoughts before meeting you again. I have little doubt you will find him at home when you return." The expression of Laura's countenance induced him to continue hurriedly, as though apprehensive of what she was going to say: "If I might presume to offer advice on so delicate a point, I would urge the imprudence of delaying that return. Your visit here, dictated as it was by a most natural and innocent impulse, is liable to serious misconstruction, which it is always wise to avoid. Should it ever be whispered that you had done me the honour—."

"Impossible!" cried Mrs. Bathurst, reddening with a sudden perception of her temerity; "I have taken every precaution against discovery."

"Such secrets are sure to transpire," returned Leicester. "Your absence will give rise to all sorts of conjectures; your explanations, when questioned, will be unsatisfactory; then either the truth will come out, fatally confirming Bath-



urst's newly-allayed doubts, or your manifest desire to conceal it will subject you to injurious suppositions, and work up his already excited mind to a pitch of fury. I hardly know what course to recommend."

As he clasped his hand to his forehead, with the instinctive gesture of perplexity, a sharp throe of pain contracted his features, which Laura now observed were paler than usual, and he dropped upon a seat.

"You have not then escaped injury?" exclaimed she, snatching a bottle of eau-de-cologne from the dressing-table, and sprinkling him with it, for he looked, and was, faint. The situation, no doubt, had its charms; Hyacinth did not reject the proffered service, while at the sight of the man she had learnt to love lying pallid and helpless before her, at the contact of that graceful head with her heaving bosom, a flood of tenderness rushed over Laura's soul, obliterating for the moment every consideration of duty and prudence. An inexpressible yearning possessed her for the affection she had once held so cheap, a vivid sense of the personal charms she had professed to despise: at that moment she would have given worlds—yes,

two worlds—to exchange her honorable, assured position of wife to the upright, sedate William Bathurst, for a precarious and humiliating dependence upon the fair and fickle Hyacinth Leycester.

When, recovering himself, he raised his blue eyes, gleaming with unwonted softness to hers, and with a slight pressure of the hand implored her to take no further heed of an “injury” so slight that he had himself forgotten it, her resolution gave way, and the torrent of ill-suppressed emotion found vent in words. Broken and incoherent they were, now sinking into the abashed murmur of confession, now rising into vehement denunciation of her wrongs; but through all these modulations, indistinct and confused as the ideas they reflected, the master-key was plainly audible.

Ah! when will women dwelling at ease, cease to regard with scorn, instead of pity, her “that is ready to slip with her feet?” When will the self-righteous, learning to read the law by the light of the gospel, lay to heart the solemn lesson that it is mainly temptation and opportunity that constitute the actual crime, and that in the eyes of Him who seeth not as man sees,

many "a woman taken in adultery, in the very act," is but a little more guilty than she who willingly dallies with an unlawful desire? Well may they who think they can stand, take heed lest they fall! Nothing had been farther from Laura's mind, when she set forth on her ill-advised errand, than an avowal both illicit and unsought; no one could have predicted such a result to her, without incurring her strongest reprobation: yet in the agitation of the stolen interview, in very despair, perhaps, at the prospect of the difficulties in which she had entangled herself, was she hurried into such a position, that her reputation, her honour, lay at the mercy of a man not famed for self-denial; her sole chance of escape depending on the use he might think fit to make of his victory.

And how did Hyacinth receive a revelation so flattering to his vanity? Truth to say, he was considerably more startled than pleased. His faculties not being clouded by the fumes of passion, the inconveniences of such a *liaison* presented themselves to him in a clearer light than its attendant gratifications. Moreover, having sealed with his blood his previous protestation of innocence, he would

have held it base to falsify his word by any subsequent dereliction. Finally, where is the man who values love that comes to him unsought?

"This is leap-year, no doubt," thought Hyacinth, as the drift of Mrs. Bathurst's disjointed sentences became apparent to him. "The votaries of propriety, methinks, outrun their more skittish sisters when they do take the bit between their teeth." After one or two attempts to stop the misguided lady's course, and prevent her from committing herself, he relinquished the task, and leant back on his cushions with an air of dignified resignation.

When she ceased, there was a dead pause, not very long in reality, but long enough to produce in her a sudden and complete revulsion of feeling. Perceiving almost as soon as the words were spoken, the error into which, in a fit of temporary excitement, she had been betrayed, her first sensation was fear lest they should be too literally understood. But from Leycester's hesitation, a new and more appalling doubt arose, whether she herself had not misinterpreted his meaning, and mistaken idle gallantries for profound feeling. The bitterness of the pang that smote her can only

be estimated by a woman. A tempest of shame, relief, regret, and mortification swept over her brain, and well nigh upset it. In vain she sought to recall, to modify her admissions; the attempt only involved her in fresh confusion. The haughty air with which she strove to cover her precipitate advance was ill sustained, till at length these conflicting emotions found vent in a flood of tears.

At this womanly symptom, Hyacinth found his tongue. "My dear Madam," he began, in his most deferential manner, "do not, I beseech you, distress yourself. I should be a wretch, utterly unworthy of my own esteem, or of yours, were I capable of taking advantage of a few unguarded expressions, prompted by tender compassion for an accident, the blame of which you probably, though most unnecessarily, take to yourself. Trust me, it did not need the sarcasms you have just levelled at me, to efface from my memory all that you do not wish me to recollect. Interpret my silence as you will: I would far rather lie under the imputation of insensibility, than claim at your hands a sympathy it would ruin you to bestow. In a cooler moment, however, you will do me justice, and restore me to

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that place in your good opinion which I seem to have forfeited by preferring your interests to my own. ('That was rather neatly put I flatter myself') was his mental comment.

"Caution, I grant," he continued aloud, "is a virtue little prized in the affairs of the heart; yet how can a man of any delicacy accept the tremendous sacrifice which a woman, in the uncalculating generosity of her disposition, is often ready to make! She it is who alone pays the penalty of the joint error. Heaven forbid I should call down so fearful a retribution upon the head of a lovely being whose sole fault was a too partial regard for my unworthy self! No, dear lady, an unmerited aspersion shall not provoke us to make it good. We will break off an intimacy too delightful, perhaps, to be safe. If we have had dreams, we will banish them; if we have wavered in our allegiance, we will renounce the incipient treason, and seek, in our several spheres, the peace that results from duties performed and temptations overcome. (My vocation is certainly the pulpit," he added internally. "If I get clear out of this scrape, I vow I'll take orders.")

Many an exemplary divine, indeed, has

preached with less effect. Appeased by his respectful tone, soothed by his implied participation in her feelings, touched by his seeming magnanimity in refusing to be made happy at the price of her perdition, and worked up by his eloquent peroration to a pitch of virtuous enthusiasm, Laura yielded to his arguments, thanked him for understanding her better than she had understood herself, and finally professed her readiness to return home. But how? that was the next point to be ascertained.

"As I came," was her simple solution of the difficulty.

Hyacinth took a more enlarged view. "It is growing dark," he said, thoughtfully. "A lady cannot walk the streets unattended at this hour. I must not offer to accompany you, because. . . ."

"In your condition, it would be madness," interrupted Laura.

"That's not the obstacle," he returned smiling, "I am not lamed, thank Heaven! and have still one arm at your service. What I mean is, that to be escorted to your door by me, would be more detrimental to your cause than to arrive there alone. If I send a servant with you,

he becomes master of your secret. Anderson is discreet, certainly; yet I do not like to subject you even to his criticism. What if he were to deposit you at some friend's house, whence you could afterwards proceed boldly to your own? All subterfuges are undignified, I freely allow; yet in this peculiar case, the honest truth will tell so very awkwardly, and the results of a misunderstanding will be so very disastrous, that one may perhaps be pardoned a slight evasion."

Mrs. Bathurst seemed less struck with the obliquity of the scheme than with the difficulty of putting it into execution. "If my mother were in town, it might be done," she said, after a hurried review of possibilities; "but I have so few acquaintances in London, that I scarcely. . . . Oh! good heavens! who is that?" she cried, turning very pale, as the noise of wheels was heard without, and a loud knock resounded through the hall.

Arrested in the act of pulling out one of the *favoris* that hung almost down to his breast (his usual resource when in any mental difficulty.) Hyacinth stood in the attitude of an eager listener, but following out meanwhile a train of



thought which had just presented itself to his fertile brain. Arriving, apparently, at a conclusion, he walked quickly to the bell, and rang it twice. Anderson appeared.

"Was that Mrs. Leycester who came in?" asked his master, tossing into the fire the match which he had just applied to the wax-lights on the mantelpiece.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell the coachman to wait, and let Mrs. Leycester know that I wish to speak with her immediately, if she will do me the favor to step down here for a minute?"

"What are you going to do with *me*?" exclaimed Laura, in affright.

"Place you under my wife's protection," replied Hyacinth. "It is a bold step, but there is no other way of securing you an honourable retreat."

"But how shall I explain. . . ."

"Leave everything to me," interrupted Leycester. "No one but myself will be compromised. Hush, here she comes."

## CHAPTER III.

"Raymon avait l'art d'être souvent coupable sans se faire haïr, souvent bizarre sans être choquant; parfois même il réussissait à se faire plaindre par les gens qui avaient le plus à se plaindre de lui. Il y a des hommes ainsi gâtés par tout ce qui les approche."

INDIANA.

Still arrayed in bonnet and shawl, the mistress of the mansion entered the room. "Commander of the faithful, behold your slave!" said she, with a playful obeisance, "What is my lord's pleasure?" Here perceiving Mrs. Bathurst, she broke off abruptly, with a gesture of astonishment.

"I sent for you, my love," said Hyacinth, handing her a chair with the utmost courtesy and self-possession, "I sent for you, confiding in your well-known goodness to excuse the liberty, and in your friendly aid to rescue this young lady from a somewhat awkward predicament. An altercation, which unfortunately

took place between Mr. Bathurst and myself a night or two ago, reached her ears to-day, and coupled with some ambiguous expressions he let fall, and his leaving home this morning, without notice, at an unusually early hour, threw her into a painful state of alarm. Finding on enquiry that the gentleman had not been seen at his place of business, and that no trace could be discovered of his movements, a dire tragedy suggested itself to her imagination, and she hastened hither to dispel or verify her doubts. Two minutes' conversation with me, of course, removed her uneasiness on Mr. Bathurst's account, at least as far as I am concerned. We were debating how she should get home, when you arrived so opportunely to assist us. I would not hear of her going home alone; and she thinks that after the disagreement between us, Mr. Bathurst might resent my attendance on his wife. Now, if you will see her safe to Montague Square, all anxiety will be at an end. The gentleman's animosity cannot extend to you. You need not go in; and we will not in future suffer so much as our thoughts to wander in that direction until Mrs. Bathurst gives us notice of welcome. How say

you, Anna? Will you undertake to be chaperone?"

He had talked on purposely to cover Laura's confusion, and allow her time to compose her spirits; nor could she, amidst all her uneasiness, fail to admire the tact with which he glided over the weak points of his narrative. It sounded plausible enough, and if Mrs. Leycester, glancing from her husband's *deshabille* to his visitor's flushed countenance, felt that there was something yet unexplained, her half-formed suspicions vanished as she looked into his fearless face. He could afford to stand her scrutiny, for his tale was strictly true, as far as it went. As he anticipated, the boldness of his course told more in his favour than any amount of rhetorical ingenuity. For the present at least Mrs. Leycester forbore to investigate further, replying with grave urbanity, "You are certain beforehand, Hyacinth, of my compliance with any request you think proper to make; I shall be happy to set Mrs. Bathurst down in Montague Square. Will you ring and desire the carriage to be brought round again?"

"I have forestalled the order," said he; "the coachman awaits your commands."

"Whenever Mrs. Bathurst is ready then," said Anna, with a somewhat stately inclination of the head.

Struggling desperately to shake off her embarrassment, Laura stammered her thanks, protesting that the loan of the carriage was a sufficient obligation. Hyacinth, in whose scheme Mrs. Leycester's company was an essential feature, was about to nullify the polite objection to give her trouble, when another loud rap at the street door made Laura break off with a faint scream.

Pursuant to instructions, Mr. Leycester was no doubt denied to the enquirer, who seemed to insist on being admitted. "I tell you, I know he is at home," he was heard to exclaim, "and I must and will see him."

Further resistance on the servant's part, (who possibly had his own reasons for deeming the visit peculiarly ill-timed), appearing likely to lead to a forcible entrance, Hyacinth, who had recognised the voice, hastily requested the two ladies to await his return, and passed out into the hall, closing the door behind him.

"What is all this disturbance, Thomas?" drawled he, with as little show of consciousness

as if he had just been woke up by the noise. Then affecting to perceive his late opponent, he drew back in well-simulated surprise.

"I fear I am the cause," said Mr. Bathurst, stepping forward, and speaking in a more subdued key. "But this fellow persisted you were not within, though I had good reason to be sure you were."

"He only obeyed my directions," replied Leicester, drily, with a nod of approval to the accused. "You must know my motive for excluding visitors to-day."

"Are there no exceptions to your rule?" asked Bathurst, with a glance which added significance to his words.

"If you have any business with me, you had better walk in here," observed Hyacinth, betraying no perception of a deeper meaning in the words, and leading the way into a small room adjoining his own, where he occasionally indulged male intimates with a cigar. His companion noticed that it was not the apartment whence the young man had issued, and the cloud darkened on his brow.

"Now, sir," began Leicester, in his blandest tone; "may I enquire the motive of this . . . ."

"Friendly call," suggested Bathurst, with a bitter sneer. "You imagine, of course, that it was to ask after your health I came?"

"Not an unprecedented mark of attention," was the quiet comment.

"I am not one of those models of chivalry . . ."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Hyacinth, who could not for the life of him repress the impertinence.

"Who bared their swords on any idle pretext, and sheathed with them the remembrance of any wrong. I fought with the stern desire of vengeance, and have only to lament the unsteadiness of my aim."

Hyacinth bowed.

"Yes, sir," pursued the other, with increasing vehemence, "had I stretched you lifeless on yonder field, I should not now be driven to cry to you: 'What have you done with my wife?'"

"If you cried so loud, even the dead might have heard," remarked Hyacinth, coolly. "Unless you wish your private affairs to furnish gossip for my servants' hall, perhaps it would be advisable to moderate your accents a little."

His chief concern was to prevent the colloquy

reaching the ladies' ears through the thin partition: any way, the retort gained him time to breathe, and rally his energies for the next attack. Mr. Bathurst was sensible, as on a former occasion, of his inferiority at this sort of fence

"You have not answered my question," he said, bluntly recurring to the main point.

"Did you put one?" returned Leycester, availing himself of his right to assume an offended air.

"I said, what is become of my wife?"

"And I say, why do you apply to me for the information?"

"Because, sir, it is you whom I suspect of having decoyed her from her home. Some unavoidable business first, and afterwards a desire to meditate upon the line of conduct I should henceforth pursue, kept me abroad until an hour ago. Duped by your seeming sincerity, I was fool enough to credit your assertion; and believing, not that either of you was free from blame, but that my suspicions might have outrun the facts, I was disposed to overlook the past, and exercise for the future greater vigilance in the selection of my acquaintance; but on



reaching my abode, I found it deserted: Laura was not there."

"Whence you conclude, with a logic that quite rivals your benevolence and your courtesy, that she must have left the house for an improper purpose! Ladies, of course, never go out shopping, or visiting, or with any such innocent intent."

"Not when their conduct has been openly impeached, sir, and men's lives are staked upon the issue."

"Still, I do not see how you connect me with Mrs. Bathurst's disappearance," said Hyacinth, disputing the ground inch by inch, and trusting to some lucky inspiration to pull him through. "I can prove an alibi, if necessary, and establish on irrefragable evidence that I have not stirred from these apartments since Captain Sandford assisted me hither."

"A letter I left for her, in case of my death, had been opened and read," resumed Mr. Bathurst, scarcely heeding the interruption. "What so natural as that, conscious of guilt, she should fly to her accomplice?"

"You count for nothing, then, my positive asseverations of innocence, repeated after stand-

ing your fire, and while hovering, for aught I knew, on the very verge of eternity?" said Leicester, dropping his flippant tone for one of grave reproach.

Mr. Bathurst was half staggered. "If you can declare with equal solemnity that you have neither seen nor communicated with her this day, I have no choice but to believe you, and to request your pardon for my injurious incredulity," he said slowly, fixing a searching glance upon his antagonist's features.

"And if," rejoined Hyacinth, with similar deliberation, "if, shocked and confounded at a charge conveyed, it is probable, in no mild terms, the unhappy lady should have sought advice, not to say refuge, in one of the few quarters open to her in London; if, bold in the consciousness of rectitude, she should have appealed to my wife for—"

"Heaven and earth!" cried Mr. Bathurst in sudden fury; "you admit then that she has been within these walls? Has been—aye, and is. Ha! you change colour; you do not deny the fact. You do well, Sir, not to add downright falsehood to dissimulation. I have watched your nervous glances towards the adjoining

chamber, and understand your scheme of keeping me in parley till its occupant should have made good her escape. But all your ingenuity will not avail to replace the bandage over my eyes. I will at once confront this wretched woman, and—”

“Are you provided with a search-warrant and a detective officer, that you talk so quietly of invading my private apartments?” said Leicester, planting himself before the door of communication. “It is not customary to seek a man out, and insult him under his own roof; but as I am not equal to the exertion of kicking you out, I passed over your outrageous language. Here, however, my forbearance ends. If you attempt to enter, without my permission, any room in the house which calls me master, I shall consider myself absolved from any further ceremony.”

But heedless of the caution, Mr. Bathurst advanced with menacing gestures, and tried to force a passage which Hyacinth as resolutely denied. A personal contest seemed likely to decide the point, for the latter could not reach the bell without leaving the door undefended; but after a slight scuffle, he put up his arm.

deprecatingly, saying, "Come, come, Bathurst, this is hardly fair, to disable a man and then take advantage of the disability."

And as he leaned back against the wall for support, the former faintness again came over him. Struck by his pallor, his antagonist immediately desisted.

"Good heavens!" cried he, "I never meant to hurt you. Why do you compel me to so rude a course? Is there anything extraordinary in my eagerness to learn the truth? Chivalrous as you assume to be, can you fail to sympathise with my apprehensions? And if your tale be true, that my wife is not concealed with any evil intention; if no discreditable discovery will result from my entrance into that chamber, why do you so strenuously oppose a step which would clear up all my doubts?"

"Enter then," said Leycester, either touched by the appeal, or determining to yield gracefully what could not longer be withheld; "but remember that my wife is ignorant of all these proceedings, and let her be spared the knowledge. Enter," he repeated, throwing open the door, "and reclaim, if you are disposed to do it in a pacific spirit, the fugitive whose

gravest fault has been an error of judgment. Knowing the animosity you cherished against me, it was perhaps rash to brave your anger by keeping up friendly relations with us, and thus create, even in appearance, a division of interests between you; but I trust the offence is a pardonable one. If I hesitated to admit you in your excited mood, it was because I would willingly have shielded the ladies from any participation in our disputes. You must have seen the carriage at the door, as you came in; Mrs. Leycester, you perceive, is ready equipped to escort her visitor home. Two minutes more, and they would have been on their road. Had there been any desire for secrecy, it would have been easy for them to have slipped away while I kept you in conversation yonder; but we preferred the more straight-forward course, and I am confident you will give us no cause to repent it."

If not thoroughly convinced, Mr. Bathurst was completely silenced by this unexpected turn of affairs. Mrs. Leycester's presence was a circumstance not to be accounted for on his theory; and being unable to invent a better, he was fain to accept the explanation tendered with such

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seeming frankness. Supposing any deception existed, it was plain that lady was as much a victim of it as himself; he had no right, he felt, to make her uncomfortable, by attributing to her husband a misdemeanour which he could not prove; and not possessing sufficient mastery over himself to support his share of the veil Hyacinth had thrown over the transaction, he deemed it most prudent to bring the interview to the speediest possible conclusion. With a few phrases of apology to Mrs. Leycester for the abrupt method of his appearance before her, he expressed his readiness to save her all further trouble with regard to his wife, and suffering Hyacinth to place her hand in his, he answered the young man's significant look by drawing it within his arm, and gently bidding her dry her tears. Adieux were quickly interchanged. Mrs. Leycester, to whom Laura still clung, accompanied her to the door; and having seen her drive away, went up stairs to take off her bonnet—and ruminate.

The mysterious scene in which she had been called to bear a part, offered much scope for reflection. That Mrs. Bathurst, with whom, though on very good terms, she had never been

particularly intimate, should fly to her for succour against some domestic grievance, appeared strange enough; that finding the mistress of the house abroad, she should make a confidant of the master—and such a master!—was stranger still. No doubt, if she believed him engaged in no amicable negotiations with her husband, there was wisdom in coming to the fountain-head for information; but whence proceeded the hostility between the two? How did it happen that Hyacinth, of all men the least given to dissension, who contrived to frequent the billiard-room and the betting-ring, the club and the boudoir, without creating an enemy, or provoking an angry word, was at open strife with one so little likely to cross his path as a quiet, steady-going lawyer? There was surely no business to squabble about; besides which, clients, however dissatisfied, are not in the habit of challenging their legal advisers. The most obvious cause of disagreement, taking Hyacinth's known character into consideration, was rendered improbable by many arguments, which Anna was but too glad to think valid.

There was no saying, however, what notions Mr. Bathurst had conceived on the subject, how

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far he might have misinterpreted idle gallantries, which the lady did not seem the person to discourage. She had been able to gather nothing from Laura, when they had been left together, the agitation of the latter having effectually prevented any connected discourse; while the upraised voices of the gentlemen bore witness to the fact of their discord, without elucidating its origin.

The conclusion which Anna was inclined to adopt was, that Mr. Bathurst had discovered some extravagance or scandal on her husband's part, and in her interests, as trustee to her marriage settlement, &c., had taken upon himself to admonish the wrong-doer with more zeal than discretion; that Hyacinth had resented the interference; and that hence a wordy war had broken out, which only one of the disputants had been considerate enough to keep from his wife's ears: a supposition which satisfactorily accounted for her husband's anxiety, not unmarked by her, to prevent either of the Bathursts from entering into the details of the altercation. While appeasing her curiosity, therefore, she might relieve his mind of some secret embarrassment.



"Poor fellow! he is delicate about pecuniary matters," said she to herself, as she rose to pursue the enquiry at once; "I have always to guess when his exchequer wants replenishing, and to coax him into the reception of a subsidy."

Descending the stairs, she knocked at his door, twice; no answer being returned, she opened it with a noise, in order to give due notice of her approach. All was still, and she at first imagined the room was empty; but a second glance around showed her Hyacinth, in a recumbent posture on the sofa, his face buried in the cushions. Surprised to find him so sound asleep in so short a time, she bent over him, and cautiously displaced the pillow, so as to gain a view of his countenance. Its unnatural paleness alarmed her; she spoke to him, first in subdued accents, then louder; till at length, the conviction forced itself upon her that no common slumber rendered him thus deaf to her voice. Getting seriously uneasy, she chafed his cold hands, sprinkled water on his forehead, and was loosening his dress to give him air, when a crimson stain on his linen caught her eye; she threw back his

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robe de chambre, and saw that on one side, the breast of his shirt was saturated with fresh blood. Her scream reached the household before the sound of the bell; a messenger was instantly despatched for medical aid, while the rest assisted in recovering their master from the deep swoon into which he had fallen.

It appeared that in the late confusion, the bandages had slipped from his wound, which began to bleed anew; weakened by previous loss of blood, he was wholly unfit to sustain the excitement he had undergone; no sooner was the pressure of necessity withdrawn, than his energies gave way, and he dropped exhausted on the couch to which he should have been confined.

Febrile symptoms quickly displayed themselves in the parched lips and throbbing brow; tormented with pain in the injured shoulder, he tossed restlessly to and fro, and as the night wore on, his mind wandered a little. It was no time for explanations; and for several hours Mrs. Leycester's thoughts were too busy with one all-engrossing theme to revert to their previous occupation.

Not until the husband, so tenderly beloved,

sank towards morning into a fitful doze had she leisure to ponder upon the recent addition to her stock of knowledge. All uncertainty as to the nature of the late quarrel was now at an end: a duel had undoubtedly been fought; and, this fact once established, the other features of the case seemed to group themselves round with terrible distinctness. Would anything short of the direst wrong have roused a man of Mr. Bathurst's frigid temperament to so fierce a retaliation? Would Hyacinth, who was neither pugnacious himself, nor wanting in skill to turn aside the wrath of others, have braved the ridicule which now attends a hostile meeting, had he not been conscious that the offence given admitted of no minor atonement?

Mrs. Fitzmaurice had cost Anna many a heart-ache, as a woman every way capable of inspiring a *grande passion*, and by no means disinclined to use her advantages; but from Laura she had apprehended no danger. Leicester, she had thought, was the last man to be caught by common-place coquetry; he must long ago have been surfeited with vulgar admiration; what new flavor had Mrs. Bathurst offered to his palled taste?

Perhaps, after all, the love was on her side only; she might have conceived for him a passion which she had neither virtue to suppress, nor cunning to conceal; her coming openly to the house and penetrating to his very bedside showed her to be either very bold, or very careless of appearances; and Mr. Bathurst hastily assuming that because she was weak, Hyacinth must be wicked, had visited upon him as a crime that which was simply a misfortune.

An uneasy motion of the sleeper here broke in upon her reverie. "My poor Cinthy!" murmured she, as she smoothed his pillow, and kissed his flushed cheek; "it is not your fault if no woman can look at you unmoved."

As if to destroy the grateful illusion, Hyacinth started up, exclaiming, "Laura!—not here,—not now,—it would be ruin;—hush! let me speak—"

Mrs. Leycester recoiled: the frequent repetition of that name seemed to prove how deeply its owner's image was engraven on his fancy. Yes, there remained little doubt that she was supplanted; and if so, how vastly was the injury aggravated by the method of its perpetration! She had been induced to cultivate an ac-

quaintance with her rival that he might have a better opportunity of prosecuting his nefarious design; her heart burnt within her as she recalled the many facilities she had been made the means of affording to the plot against her; and when detection threatened the guilty pair, she had been called in, with unparalleled effrontery, to give the sanction of her presence to so gross a violation of the commonest decorum. No wonder Mrs. Bathurst had shrunk abashed from her enquiring glance, and manifested at her first entrance only one degree less of terror and confusion than on the subsequent arrival of a sterner judge! Could no other spot have been selected as a rendezvous than the apartment fitted up with such fond prodigality for the bridegroom of last year?

“Does he reckon on my being so simple as not to discover his perfidy,” said Anna, half aloud, “or so tame as not to resent it? Either way he shall find..... But it is time he should take that draught. I wonder, is it worth while to wake him for the purpose? He slumbers now so peacefully.”

## CHAPTER IV.

"Here are a few of the unpleasant'st words,  
That ever blotted paper!"

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

"I have done ill;  
Of which I do accuse myself so sorely,  
That I will joy no more."

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

OF all the unlucky incidents which had lately befallen Hyacinth Leycester, perhaps the most unfortunate was, that his illness was not of a more serious description. While he lay on a sick bed, racked with pain, burning with fever, it was not in woman's nature to remember his transgressions. Had he made a lengthened appeal to her kindly sympathies, Anna would have been so absorbed in the task of winning him back to health, yearnings over the traitor would so far have effaced the recollection of his treachery, that the offence would have been insensibly condoned; fresh chains would have been twined

round her heart, nor could she, after a long interval, have spurned from her the head she had so often pillowed on her breast. But after that first anxious night, the bad symptoms rapidly abated; a slight tendency to inflammation was happily subdued, and there being no lurking evil in the general system to combat, the local injury was comparatively easy to heal.

The young man had, indeed, received from nature an internal organisation as wholly perfect as the outward symmetry of his frame; nor had he as yet indulged in any excesses to such an extent as to derange the wondrous mechanism. After another day of languor and prostration, came a night of partial repose; on the next he began to mend, and slept soundly; the morning after, a decided improvement was visible; and on the fifth day, he was pronounced convalescent.

"You may sit up for half an hour, if you like," said the doctor, "but you are not to go smoking cigars, Sir, nor letting in any of the captains I meet at the door enquiring after you. The less you talk and excite yourself the next few days, the sooner you will be restored to your anxious friends."

"You don't object to female visitors, I suppose," said the invalid, demurely.

"Why, you young reprobate," cried the doctor, who had brought him into the world, and cherished a sort of paternal regard for his handiwork, "you wouldn't be having women in here to keep you company."

"Why not?" returned Hyacinth. "I dare say I should look very interesting, with my hair brushed a good deal out of curl, and a pale blue ribbon round my neck."

"Pale blue stuff!" ejaculated the doctor, in high wrath. "Now, I tell you what, my fine fellow, if you're up to any such foolery, I'll have your head shaved; and then see what a figure you'll cut."

With which dire threat, he quitted the room, repeating in substance to Mrs. Leycester, whom he encountered outside, the verdict he had just pronounced within.

"Then you really consider him out of danger," she said, thoughtfully.

"Danger, I don't think he ever was in," replied the doctor. "Had he taken my advice at first, and gone to bed like a rational being, he would have been well by this time. With ordinary pre-



cautions, he will be quite himself again in a day or two. The great point is to keep him quiet; he is already talking of holding a levee in there, or perhaps, I should rather say, a Drawing-room!"

"So soon!" thought his wife, with a sigh. "Will nothing cure him of that deplorable levity?"

Yet the touch of adversity had not been wholly unproductive of benefit. In his enforced seclusion, many a train of thought had suggested itself which, during his hours of health, he would never have had patience to pursue. Steady reflection was an excellent corrective to one whose faults were rather the result of giddiness than of evil determination. To this must be added the sobering influence of a sick room upon a young man who had never been ill in his life before. The stronger sex are always far more easily depressed by even trifling ailments; and Hyacinth was no exception to the rule.

Indeed, without taking too serious a view of his indisposition, there was no doubt he had been in peril of his life. The shot which had grazed his shoulder might have lodged full in his breast; and what account would he have had to render of his twenty-four years of existence?

Of what avail would it have been that he had figured as the handsomest man, the most original idler, the most favored gallant of his era? A career of folly (to say no worse), a premature and violent death, an ephemeral reputation,—this was all he would have had to set against a lost eternity! He really would try and make some worthier use of his protracted span; he would entangle himself in no more such intrigues.

“Drink waters out of thine own cistern,” read he, turning over at random the leaves of a Book which Mrs. Leycester had left on his table: “‘A wound and dishonour shall he get that meddles with his neighbour’s wife.’ Ah! Solomon knew what he was talking about. And after all, my lawful spouse is a very charming creature; if she had belonged to any one else, I dare say I should admire her vastly. She is at least equal to the tiresome little flirt who got me into this scrape. Women are so impulsive when once their feelings are stirred, there is no telling to what lengths they may go, or what wild schemes they may conceive and execute. To think of any one rushing headlong to destruction in that manner, and imposing upon me the delicate task of curbing

her imagination! No doubt she cherished some romantic vision of living in a state of primeval purity, after the most approved French fashion, out of the reach of the ecclesiastical Courts, in a vine-clad cottage on the shores of an Italian lake, where the moral atmosphere is not too searching, and your passport is of infinitely greater consequence than your marriage certificate! How we were to pay the rent of said cottage, or what we were to live on besides the produce of a garden, cultivated by our own hands (a nice state mine would be in, after a week's weeding!), it never entered her head to enquire; or if it did, she settled that we were to support ourselves, she by making bead purses most likely, I by giving lessons in singing. There we were to spend our peaceful years in the practice of all the Christian virtues (except, of course, the one we had found inconvenient), and rear up an interesting family of illegitimate angels. For this is how many a gentle sinner deludes herself; as if what was begun wrong could possibly come right, or caprice be expected to form a stronger bond than the most solemn obligations!

“We men, I think, are less ingenious in self-

deception : with fewer scruples to overcome, we need no such refined sophistry to cover our transgressions, and perhaps we know ourselves too well to be taken in by it. We have a lurking consciousness that we shall grow tired of the Italian lake, and want to come back to our Clubs; and some fine day we do come back. The world is a little shy at first, but soon shakes hands with us; the female portion, who have no *esprit de corps*, making but a faint show of opposition to our reinstatement. Meanwhile, the deserted Ariadne languishes upon her rock, until—well, until Bacchus comes by and picks her up, and . . . . . Truly the Turks are wise to maintain that women have no souls; for if they have, and if we are responsible for the mischief we do them, there will be very few men in heaven!

“I wonder how Laura and old Bathurst will get on together after all this disturbance! I made out a very fair case for them both, if they have *savoir faire* enough to profit by it. My chief concern, however, is with the home department. I am rather curious to ascertain in what light my liege lady viewed these remarkable proceedings. She certainly behaved

most admirably, in seconding my endeavours to bring the estranged couple together again; not a word or a look, while Mr. Bathurst was present, betrayed a suspicion of any underhand practices; nor has she alluded to the subject since. Was she satisfied with my explanation? Either her faith in me really overcame her feminine penetration, or she is magnanimous enough to bury her doubts in oblivion. Whichever it be, I owe her a fresh debt of gratitude for her conduct in this matter.

“How tenderly, too, she nursed me through this illness! At all hours of the day and night I saw, or rather felt her near me. Had I been the fondest and most faithful of husbands, she could hardly have shown me more unremitting attention. It almost pained me to accept kind offices on which I had so little claim; for though free from actual guilt in this one instance, in how many others have I wronged her! How completely have I withheld the affection she sacrificed everything to obtain! I was tempted sometimes to confess my unworthiness, and let her know me for the hypocrite that I am; but, as La Rochefoucault says: “*On est quelquefois moins malheureux d'être trompé de ce qu'on aime,*

*que d'en être détrompé.*" It would not add to her happiness to learn how her confidence had been abused: I will rather study to deserve it for the future. I will propose to travel; an absence of some months enables one to drop quietly many a *liaison* which it is not politic to break off abruptly; and when we return, I can take up, without ostentation, my new character. But what has become of 'my dear mistress,' as that humbug, Henry Esmond, calls his ancient flame! She has not been near me all day. Is not Mrs. Leycester at home, Anderson?" he asked of his valet, who entered opportunely with with some article of invalid diet.

"I am not sure, sir, but I'll enquire," answered the man, loitering, however, about his master longer than the necessary arrangements for his comfort seemed to require. A scrupulous regard for the patient's digestion further induced Anderson to delay returning with the desired information; he re-appeared at last with the news that Mrs. Leycester had gone out, leaving for Hyacinth the letter produced; after delivering which, he discreetly withdrew.

Mr. Leycester eyed it with something like apprehension. "This looks alarming!" quoth

he; "I earnestly trust Madume does not intend to carry on the war with me in writing, like that dreadful fellow in one of Mrs. Trollope's novels. I am no hand at literary composition, and have more faith in my blue eyes than in any amount of blue ink."

The letter ran thus:—

"You will probably learn without surprise, as without regret, that the same roof has ceased to shelter us both. As long as your safety was doubtful, I suppressed my natural indignation at the outrage offered me, and forbore to dwell upon the cause in which your hurt was received. I could not abandon you to hired solicitude, or to the chance care of those who may, in happier moments, frequent your boudoir; self-devotion is hardly to be anticipated from persons incapable of self-control. Equally impossible was it for me to harass your languid ear with reproaches, or incite you to draw upon your imagination for a fresh series of fictitious narratives. Now that your confinement is at an end, your recovery certain, I venture to break the silence hitherto imposed upon me, while hastening to relieve you of my presence.

"Oh! Hyacinth, it was a humiliating part

you made me play. You should not have taken advantage of my confiding fondness to render me a party to my own betrayal, nor have allowed me to become a mark for public derision. What triumph was there in out-witting one who never questioned your sincerity, or sought to regulate your actions? Why deprive me of a slighted woman's last consolation,—the luxury of weeping *in secret*? I do not blame you for not prizing the wealth of affection I have spent upon you; men, I have heard said, are little affected by a tenderness they do not share; yet to bring into my very house the woman you preferred to me, to expose on her behalf the life you swore to devote to me, to affix an open stigma upon the name for which alone I am indebted to you,—these are mortifications you might have spared me: I have deserved better at your hands.

“ My purpose, however, in penning these lines, was not to indulge in vain recrimination, but simply to communicate to you the steps which, after much anxious thought, I have deemed it advisable to take. On our former footing we could not continue to associate; we must part. Would to God I could release you from the yoke which presses so heavily on you, and set



you free to form new ties more congenial to your taste! No selfish desire to retain the honorary title of your wife, should induce me to resist your wishes; but there are, I fear, insuperable difficulties in the way of your enfranchisement. To say nothing of the painful publicity attending such an application, a divorce would deprive you of the fortune for which you have endured my society. Except on one point, however, I can, and hereby do, restore you to liberty; I leave you in uncontrolled possession of this house; my bankers have received instructions to honour your drafts to the amount of half my income; I renounce all claim upon your care and protection, and will adopt any fable you choose to put forward as the motive of our separation. May you be happier than I knew how to make you, and never miss the friendship you have driven away!

“Farewell,

“ANNA.”

Hyacinth was cut to the heart on perusing this epistle. Its cold measured tone impressed him more strongly than any upbraidings. Experience had taught him that the vehemence of expostulation

was generally in proportion to the depth of the wounded feeling. "If she lets me go without a remonstrance, it is because she is tired of me," had been one of his maxims; "or because she believes me incorrigible," was the alternative now admitted. This quiet, deliberate, undramatic renunciation showed a far more keen and abiding resentment than any outburst of passion, or resolution taken in the heat of the moment. The very moderation of its general tone, made one or two sharp words in the letter more galling. Of such was the double allusion to his inventive faculties—a charge so nearly approximating to one of falsehood, that the spirited gentleman writhed under it. He bore with greater equanimity the imputation of mercenary views, though it was pressed home with contemptuous directness.

What could be said or done to heal such a breach as this? Her heart must be inexorably closed against him. She had matured her plans as she sat by his bed-side; she departed without hurry or excitement as soon as her arrangements were completed, deserting him in the hour of languor and depression,—for the attempt to sit up had convinced him how weak he was, and he

did not know what to make of his reduced condition. Eager as he had been to quit his couch, he was still more glad to get back to it; and felt in his weariness a craving for female sympathy and companionship. Anderson was dexterous and attentive, but there was no soothing charm in his touch; his zeal failed to satisfy one accustomed all his life long to be fondled and ministered to by women.

Never had he passed so cheerless an evening. He was alone—a thing he detested; unwell—a state he did not understand; and a prey to all sorts of uncomfortable sensations. Confounded by the suddenness of the blow, hurt at the method of its infliction, annoyed at its possible results, worried with the attempt to calculate them, grieved at his own share in the business, irritated against others, and disposed, in his gloomy frame of mind, to take the most desponding view of all the circumstances, it was no wonder the physician found it necessary to increase the strength of his composing draught that night.

A good night's rest prevented any serious damage to his health from this untoward occurrence. He was able to leave his bed the next

day for a longer time with less fatigue; and but for the weight on his spirits, might have been considered in a flourishing condition. Daylight, however, brought all his troubles on him afresh, with this aggravation, that he began now to ponder what was best to do, as well as to brood over what had been done. His pride, and, let us say, his better feelings revolted against the idea of a separate maintenance, flung to him with a taunt; yet he was not quite prepared to sue for the restoration of conjugal rights.

Could he have known the tears shed over the composition he denounced as frigid, have guessed the writer's cruel perplexity, her anxious care not to wound him unnecessarily, her hesitation up to the last moment of departure, he would probably have executed the project which did occur to him, of tracking her movements, and offering in person such excuses and assurances as should mitigate her displeasure, and replace matters upon an amicable footing. But no tears were visible upon the paper; the handwriting was firm and steady, and the very fact that there was emotion to be concealed, made the phraseology stiff and formal. There seemed little

Cinthy! Dacre told us, though, that you were seized with a penitent fit on the field of battle, and intended to come out very strong in the moral and domestic line."

"So I did," replied Hyacinth, reverting at once to his troubles; "but unfortunately, you see, an unforeseen obstacle,—don't laugh, Lawrence, I'm not joking, I assure you,—an unforeseen obstacle has frustrated all my good resolutions. To be plain, my wife has left me."

"The devil she has!" was the Guardsman's emphatic comment. "What, gone and left you chargeable to the parish?"

"Not quite so bad as that," answered Hyacinth, with a momentary smile. "She has made ample provision for my necessities; but am I to acquiesce contentedly in this arrangement, and consent to become a sort of out-pensioner upon the bounty of a woman who repudiates my society?"

"Well, I suppose it would be an unpleasant position to a fellow with scruples. But how came you to let her go? I thought you were plausible enough to talk over all the women in Christendom."

"I had no idea she took this affair so much

to heart," returned Leycester; "still less did I imagine she would throw me over in this cavalier fashion."

"You must act the cavalier by her, in another sense, and coax her back again," was all the advice Lawrance could offer.

"But I don't know where she is?" objected the invalid, half fretfully.

"Find out," was the laconic reply. "Why, bless my heart, Cinthy, you would not be so easily foiled, if it were your mistress."

"You see, I have been more accustomed to practise, than to endure desertion," said Hyacinth, relaxing into his habitual tone; noticing which improvement in his spirits, the Captain led the conversation to other topics, and gossiped away an hour very pleasantly.

"Make haste and get strong, Don Giovanni the second," he said, on taking his leave; "we are impatient to have you among us once more."

Less affectionate was the greeting of Mr. Dacre, who now thought it time to enquire after his "friend;" and entertained him with all the witty and the ill-natured remarks passed by the world without, upon the recent "*fracas* in fashionable life."

"La Fitzmaurice is furious," he added; "and will banish you from her imperial court for high treason."

"*Suo danno!*" replied Hyacinth, shrugging his shoulders, "I am tired of her exactions, and she actually has the bad taste to admire Lord Wells."

"You do not lack condolence, I observe," said Dacre, pointing to a heap of little notes, superscribed in delicate Italian hands.

"Pish!" ejaculated Leycester, sweeping them away with his arm. "I have a more serious correspondent to deal with just now. Read this letter, and let me have the benefit of your opinion upon it."

Dacre took Mrs. Leycester's epistle (which her husband held out on a sudden impulse, yet surrendered with reluctance), and read it straight through without interruption.

"Well, you are a lucky fellow, and no mistake," he said, when he had finished.

"Lucky!" repeated Hyacinth, roused from a moody contemplation of the fire.

"To be sure," continued Dacre. "You marry a lady of mature years, for the sake of her money: in little more than a twelvemonth,

she quits you of her own accord, without any bother, leaving you half her fortune. If you don't call that luck, I should wish to know what you understand by the term?"

"Nonsense, Dacre! this matter is beyond a jest. I want practical advice, not banter."

"In all solemnity, then, my dear fellow, I protest I don't understand what more you would have. You surely don't mean to set up a Byronic lamentation over your 'desolate hearth;' and bewail the 'household gods shivered around' you, to use that noble humbug's pet phrase!"

A shade of vexation clouded Hyacinth's countenance, but he commanded his voice to answer calmly: "I do not ask *you* to take the sentimental view of the question; but you are too well versed in the etiquette of our world not to perceive the *inconvenience* of my position. Abroad, the case might be different; but in this country, incompatibility of tastes or temper, or even such piccadilloes as mine, are not held sufficient to warrant a separation between man and wife. They may live in daily strife, like cat and dog; or lead, like monks of La Trappe, a totally distinct and independent existence under the same roof; but they *must* dine out



together, and leave their cards at the same time."

"A neat compendium of matrimonial obligations!" observed Dacre. "Why don't you publish it for the benefit of 'persons about to marry?' With the weight of your name attached, it would go a long way to reassure the timorous, and enlighten the unsophisticated. But jesting apart, if you deem your lady's presence here indispensable to your comfort or credit, the law, always mindful of a husband's convenience, arms you with full powers to compel her return."

"The law!" exclaimed Leycester, sitting upright in his chair. "What would you have said of me, if after that scene with Bathurst at the Club, I had laid an information against him for provoking me to a breach of the peace?"

"Well," replied Dacre, with an air of deliberation, "I am not prone to use harsh language, but it is possible I might have called you a sneak."

"And what, pray, is the appropriate term for a man who, by ill-treatment, neglect, or infidelity, first alienates his wife's affections, and then appeals to the law to reinforce his forfeited claims."

"I should simply style him a fine specimen of the much-vaunted British husband, who had done no more than it was his right, and even his duty to do. Yes, I understand that curl of the lip, my Quixotic young friend; but I say decidedly, it is your duty to discourage such insubordinate proceedings. I speak dispassionately you know; but just consider for a moment, if every woman, who, on the grounds you mentioned, has reason to complain of her husband, were to pack up her goods and leave him—how many households, do you suppose, would remain entire?"

It was very perverse of Hyacinth to continue unsatisfied; but that he was so, was evident to Mr. Dacre, who having exhausted all the sympathy he had to bestow upon an affair which did not touch him personally, now rose to go. The handle of the door was in his grasp, when he turned round to say: "By the bye, Cinthy, I conclude you don't suspect Mrs. Leycester of taking a companion in her flight?"

The blood rushed to the young husband's cheek.

"I insinuate nothing," resumed Dacre; "only it does strike me, sometimes, that you married

rakes are singularly heedless of the effects of a bad example. Good bye."

He nodded, and withdrew. Hyacinth was not sorry to be relieved of his presence. The thoroughly worldly tone of Dacre's mind often revolted one who could occasionally mount "up to heaven's gate in theory," though he was far too often "down to earth's dust in practice;" but it jarred most painfully on his present excited feelings. The utter selfishness of the code on which he had avowedly acted, had never appeared to him before in so odious a light; and he brooded despondingly over the difficulty of removing from Mrs. Leycester's mind a conviction now brought home so strongly to himself.

To the suggestion of her unfaithfulness he gave, after the first instant, no credit whatever; but his over-weening confidence in her blind attachment to himself was shaken, and all his wonted acuteness failed to point out his next move. It was, in fact, no longer a game he was playing, with a cool head to plan, and ample time to execute his manœuvres: his callous heart had actually been reached, and drawn towards Anna to an extent of which he was wholly

unconscious, till the link was violently snapped asunder. It would have tasked a person more skilled in self-examination to analyse the mixture of contrition, wounded pride, and awakened sensibility, under the influence of which he wrote the following letter :—

“Condemned, as I have been, unheard, I yet feel I have little right to complain of the severe sentence passed upon me. That my conduct towards the best of wives has not been in all respects what it should be, I confess with shame and sorrow; but in the particular instance which overcame your habitual indulgence, I pledge you my honour as a gentleman, I was not so much to blame as you think me. I did not falsify one single incident of the story I told you; and if the narrative, though true, did not contain the whole truth, some excuse may be pleaded for the difficulty of entering fully into the circumstances in the presence of a lady, whom my unguarded behaviour had helped to bring into a very embarrassing position. It is an awkward thing for a man to exculpate himself at the expense of a woman, or to boast of the favour he is supposed to have found in her eyes; but thus pressed, I solemnly deny having invited Mrs.

Bathurst's visit, or given cause for her husband's violence. Indiscreet, I may have been,—must have been, indeed; but not guilty, upon my soul! All that was dubious in the case, I could have explained to you in private, had you manifested any curiosity on the subject; but I mistook your silence for indifference, and was glad to spare myself and you the details of a forgotten scandal.

“Little did I anticipate the storm that silence foreboded! little dream, when last you watched my slumbers, of the solitude to which I should awake! Was it kind to abandon me without a word? to give me no chance of averting my doom? When the question was once asked,—‘How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?’ One whose sayings I know you reverence, answered: ‘I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven;’ and am not I dearer to thee, my Anna, than ten brothers? Ah! if you could but have borne with me a little longer, methinks I might not always have been so unworthy of your love.

“I do not, however, mean this as a reproach. You were not bound to undertake a scapegrace's reformation. My follies offended you; my

caprices taxed your patience; you were quite independent of me, and you threw off the yoke. I, bow to your decision, but not upon your terms. While I flattered myself with possessing your affections, I felt no scruple in sharing your purse; it is another thing to be set aside with an annuity, like a superannuated gardener. I have never claimed to stand very high in the moral scale, but you rate me too low. I am neither profligate enough to carry on an intrigue under your very roof, nor mean enough to accept its shelter on the conditions proposed. As soon as my strength permits, I shall take my departure. You may, therefore, return whenever it suits you, to your house, where you shall never henceforth be disturbed by your husband,

“HYACINTH LEYCESTER.”

This epistle he, acting upon such indications of her route as Anna had left behind her, directed to Hildhurst Lodge; and forthwith commenced preparations for his own flight, which he urged on with restless haste. At his doctor's next visit, he broached the subject of change of air; and having extorted consent to a measure

which that gentleman deemed rather premature, he desired Anderson to pack up his clothes, as he was going into the country on a visit to his sister.

"One would think master was never coming back," said the valet to himself, as he surveyed the pile of linen he had to stow in the portmantau. It did not escape his notice, that Hyacinth selected the least ornamental part of his extensive wardrobe, nor that his costly dressing case and writing apparatus were exchanged for others of a more humble description. The fact, however, that he was only travelling for his health, was a valid reason why he should not encumber himself with full dress; while the showy articles above-named might perhaps be considered out of place in a rural parsonage. Anderson would have been far more puzzled, had he seen his master take the diamond ring from his finger, and lay it with studs, pins, and whatever other jewellery he had either received as presents from his wife, or purchased with her money, in a small ivory casket, the key of which, sealed up and labelled, he deposited in a drawer in her room.

A strange sense of desolation came over

him as he entered the deserted apartment. He sat down on the sofa at the foot of the bed, for he was fatigued after mounting the stairs, and fell into a reverie, embracing his year of married life, now brought to so abrupt a termination. The retrospect was less agreeable than the reality had been,—for past pleasures, like faded flowers, have no value except for the associations connected with them; the present looked gloomy enough; the future was a blank. If during that pause, a doubt insinuated itself of the wisdom of the course he was pursuing, he shook it off; and rising with a start, crept shivering back to the fire.



## CHAPTER V.

*"The greatest obstacle to being heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove oneself a fool."*

THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day, when Hyacinth, dispirited, and grievously wearied with his journey, arrived at the door of Blithedale Rectory, where he received as cordial a welcome as an uninvited guest had a right to expect. With enlarged means, Mrs. Aguilar had not grown more methodical in her habits; and her household was not one of that orderly kind in which the addition of a stranger, at twenty-four hours' notice, creates little disturbance or confusion. She was very happy to see her brother, of course; but just then she was "unsettled with regard to her servants,"—a chronic complaint with some housekeepers,—and "they were just going to have a thorough clean up;" and in short, she had a dozen reasons for not wanting

his company at that particular juncture, which all vanished for the moment when she caught sight of his pale face and dejected mien. There was nothing to be done but to embrace him affectionately (a most reviving process to him!) install him in an easy chair by the fire in his bedroom, and send him up some refreshment as soon as it could be prepared.

The regular dinner had been partaken of several hours before, but the cook had received instructions to keep something for the traveller, and was in the act of re-warming a large, greasy mutton chop, when Anderson fortunately entered the kitchen, and arrested the impending blow to his master's nerves.

"My stars!" quoth he, "you never imagine Mr. Leycester is going to eat *that*? Why, he was always a dainty gentleman, and now that he is fresh from a sick bed, the mere sight of such a dish would upset him."

"I reckon he'll have to go without, then;" said the head of the culinary department. "There ain't nothin else in the 'ouse, unless you think he'd like a poached hegg, and a rasher o' bacon."

Anderson shook his head at the broad slice of

fat thinly streaked with lean. "You mentioned eggs," he observed, in a tone of gentle gravity, borrowed from his master. "Could you manage an omelette?"

"A what?" asked the girl, who had left her native village for the first time not a fortnight before. Anderson sighed, and fell into a brown study, the result of which was—coffee. "Is there any to be had, Mrs. Cook?"

"I could make you some," she replied hesitatingly; "but it ain't tea-time, yet."

Passing with a bland smile over this objection, the valet requested to be favoured with the raw material, and declining foreign aid, himself concocted a cup of that little-understood beverage, which, with an egg and a slice of crisp dry toast, he trusted might prove acceptable to Mr. Leycester's palate.

Hyacinth had done no more, in his brief note, than hint at his domestic embarrassments; and was in no hurry to relieve the curiosity thus excited. Lightly as he was accustomed to think and speak of such matters, he knew that by his brother-in-law's stricter code of morality, much would be found in his conduct worthy of reprobation; and he shrank from the anticipated

sermon with as much repugnance as he had previously felt for the moral obtuseness of his own set. There was at this time a loosening of the worldly soil about his heart, that might, in skilful hands, have been made conducive to its improvement; patiently watered with precepts, and strongly propped by example, the tree, already not destitute of leaves, might soon have brought forth fruit.

But Mr. Agnilar, unhappily, if not a mere formalist, was allied with a sect which distinguishes itself by a childish adherence to rites and ceremonies; and though to him these forms might mean something, to the uninitiated they appeared a lifeless round of superstitious observances, capable of affording no peace to the conscience, no nourishment to the soul. Considering his inherent laziness, the multiplicity of services he imposed upon himself argued no small amount of self-denial; but Hyacinth, who saw him rush away unshorn to prayers at eight o'clock, or quit his newly-entered study for litany at twelve, or lecture at seven, in a church containing on the average a score of hearers, could not but fancy his time might have been more profitably employed in gathering

stores of instruction for the pulpit, and preparing his flock, by pastoral visits during the week, for the public worship of the Sabbath.

As a sick man rejects the food on which others thrive, so to a mind not healthy enough to extract nutriment from any kind of diet, there was nothing satisfactory in the ceaseless iteration even of "sound words;" heard too often to produce their due effect upon an ear not trained to appreciate their lofty strain. Discontented with the world and with himself, Hyacinth sincerely wished to amend his ways, and try the power of religion to make him a better and a happier man. To this end principally, he had sought the rectory, and for some time strove diligently to follow the course there marked out for him. But it would not do: there is no laying the dust with an empty watering-pot; no purchasing spiritual balm with tithes of mint and cummin. The tired worldling felt his need, but knew not where to find the remedy, and his guide, alas! was partially blind.

Hyacinth's natural acuteness preserved him from self-deception in this matter. He saw plainly the hollowness of the system he was invited to pursue; that it was merely substitu-

ting a whirl of serious dissipation for the vanities he was accustomed to pursue, and was conscious that while he paid a constrained attention to the incessant devotional services enjoined him, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" was the secret language of his soul. If he sought in his brother-in-law's preaching the key to the mysteries of his faith, disappointment again awaited him. Much was said therein of the Church, little of Christ; great stress was laid upon the authority of St. Augustine and St. Jerome, whom Hyacinth, in his ignorance, confounded with St. George and St. Dunstan, and other apocryphal ornaments of the Romish calendar, while small reference was made to St. John and St. Paul, whose commission he would at least have understood and respected; and instead of the divine invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that are burdened with sorrow, remorse, or doubt, and ye shall find rest unto your souls," the exhortation most frequently repeated by Mr. Aguilar was, "Let him that is disturbed in mind come to *me*, or to some other discreet and learned minister, that he may receive the benefit of absolution," &c.

Without in any way disputing the propriety

and value of the offer of "ghostly counsel and advice," in the place where it occurs (viz., in the warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion), it must be said that the phrase is eagerly adopted by many a young priest of Mr. Aguilar's stamp, as warranting that species of spiritual direction which the Anglo-Catholic body pants to obtain. Futile, however, in this case, were the reverend Sidney's endeavours to push his ministerial mediation so far. Hyacinth could by no means be brought to forget the individual in the office, and "open his grief" to a man not much his senior, of whose judgment and intelligence he entertained no very exalted opinion, whatever might be the amount of his learning and discretion.

So little confidence indeed, did he place in the wisdom, or perhaps the sympathy of his relatives, that he not only hesitated to reveal the inward workings of his conscience, but suffered some time to elapse before he took their opinion upon the recent occurrences in his household. It was much easier to mention Mrs. Leycester's flight to his London associates, who took in the whole affair at a glance, and saw nothing in it to scandalize or surprise them very much, than to

make it clear to a clergyman of irreproachable manners, whose knowledge of the world did not include familiarity with all the evil committed in it. Neither was the story he had to tell one altogether fitted for his sister's ears; so that between his fear of shocking her, and his horror of Mr. Aguilar's lectures, he delayed as long as possible the necessary explanations.

When they were put in possession of the facts, their condemnation of his conduct was as decided as he anticipated, and even more sweeping; for while he frankly admitted his errors up to the period of the rupture, they held him liable to censure for his subsequent proceedings, and could not be convinced by any of his attempts at self-justification. What he termed spirit and delicacy, the rector called rampant pride, as inconsistent as it was unsanctified; "for," as he bluntly argued, "since you were not too high-minded to marry for money, what right have you take offence at the imputation of mercenary motives? Again, you first contrive to impress your lady with a notion of your utter indifference to her, and then complain of the withdrawal of her esteem from you. Really, Leicester, you are not reasonable."



"Besides," continued this inexorable Mentor, "it appears to me that you were mighty prompt to take Mrs. Leycester at her word. Depend upon it, your readiness to accept her plan of separation, proposed no doubt on the spur of the moment, will be ascribed less to wounded feeling than to a desire to rid yourself of domestic ties."

"What! when I voluntarily relinquish all the advantages I am taunted with deriving from the connection?" cried Hyacinth, dismayed at this new view of what he considered his unimpeachably disinterested behaviour.

"That is just what I think so foolish of you, Cinthy," chimed in his sister. "What was the use of hampering yourself with a wife at your age, if you are to throw away all you gained by marrying? It is very well to say you will not be indebted to Mrs. Leycester, though, as her husband, I suppose you have a right to her whole fortune, instead of the half she offers you; but how do you mean to live without it?"

"As I did before I acquired any title to its enjoyment," said Hyacinth shortly.

"What! fall back upon that wretched pittance, after the style of expenditure to which

you have lately been accustomed! Why, my dear Cinthy, you must be mad to dream of it."

"Mad or not, I see no other course to pursue," retorted Leycester. "What do you, who are of sane mind, advise? A suit in the ecclesiastical Courts for the restitution of conjugal rights; or an advertisement in the *Times*: "A. L. is entreated to return to her disconsolate husband?" "

"If you were in a mood to profit by counsel," said Mr. Aguilar gently, "I should most strongly recommend you, on all grounds, to lose no time in making up this unfortunate quarrel. A few words of apology—or, if that phrase shocks you, a few expressions of regret, uttered as you know how, may re-establish your empire in a heart that cannot yet be entirely closed against you."

"Impossible!" cried Hyacinth; "such means might have been employed at an earlier stage, but when the ground has been measured, and the pistols loaded, explanations come with a very bad grace. Had she given me a chance, I think I could have appeased her resentment; but after her open declaration of war, after the

letters that have passed between us, I cannot humiliate myself so far as to sue for pardon."

"And yet, my dear Leycester, it is for you to make the first advance. You assure me that you are guiltless, in deed at least, of the crime imputed to you, but on your own showing, appearances were sufficiently against you. I am no judge of the light in which the world views these transactions, nor of the point to which a wife's forbearance is expected to extend; but Mrs. Leycester, you admit, had ample reason for supposing her confidence grossly abused; and I do not, therefore, think you should grudge a trifling sacrifice of dignity—if it be one—to soothe her natural indignation. Granting the task to be unpleasant, a timely concession may spare you both years of unhappiness and remorse; do not refuse to make at least one effort towards a reconciliation."

"And if it should not be met in the same spirit?"

"You will at any rate have removed part of the blame from your own shoulders, and avoid the reproach of being as unbending in wrong, as you were unstable in right."

"Besides, dear, if you and Anna once meet

face to face, all will go well, I am sure," said Rose, seeking to allay the sting in her husband's last words.

Hyacinth took no heed of the interpolation. "You are, I perceive, a strictly impartial judge," was his rejoinder to Sidney, "for while doing every justice to my misdemeanours, you tacitly give me credit for unbounded good nature."

"I am too plain-spoken, you mean," said Mr. Aguilar; "but you will, I trust, excuse my freedom, in consideration of my earnest wish to be of service to you. It is well to hear the truth sometimes."

"Possibly," returned Leycester. "Disagreeable things always are said to be salutary; physic, flogging, early rising, stale bread, and candid friends, included. I must go and regale myself with a cigar, to take the taste of *truth* out of my mouth. You don't smoke, I believe?"

"I hope your brother is not offended, Rose," said Mr. Aguilar, after Hyacinth had left the room.

"You were rather hard upon him, Sidney, dear," replied the lady. "But with all his faults, he has the best temper in the world. By the time he has finished his cigar, he will have forgotten everything you have said."

This was not exactly what the good rector could have desired; but one-sided as the consolation was, he was fain to be content. Rose was quite correct in her anticipation. Hyacinth showed no angry recollection of his brother-in-law's sincerity; and took his own course as deliberately as if he had never heard a syllable uttered against it.

He needed to fortify himself in obstinacy, for a fresh burst of opposition was to be expected from his mother, when she learnt the plan he intended to carry out. To write and inform her of the change of circumstances which compelled him to reclaim the small property he had ceded to her on his marriage, was the next thing to be done; but it was postponed from day to day, with a degree of irresolution not usual with Hyacinth. Heedless as he professed himself of other people's opinions, the unanimous disapproval of all those whom he had consulted, might well induce him to reconsider his project before actually putting it into execution; and the longer he pondered, the more reason he saw to doubt his own wisdom.

When his first enthusiasm was a little cooled down, and he came to examine in detail the

scheme he had hitherto contemplated only *en gros*, many misgivings of its practicability occurred to him. Supposing himself once more in possession of his former income, how would it suffice for his present exigencies? The sum had barely covered his personal expenditure, when he had a home with his mother, and was only called on to contribute a trifle towards the manifold charges of housekeeping. To reside with her now, under her new husband's roof, was out of the question; how was he to defray rent, taxes, board, firing, clothes, servants' wages, and a hundred minor items, out of a hundred and forty pounds a year? Such a problem might puzzle a head more skilled in economic science; Hyacinth pored over it till the figures seemed stamped upon his brain, without arriving any nearer to a definite solution.

At the root, perhaps, of his disinclination to enter upon the business with Mrs. Desart, lay a secret hope that his wife would relent, and moved by his written protestations, annul the sentences he had pronounced against him, in which case he would have uselessly incurred the odium of retracting a favour bestowed. But time passed on, and no message of peace reached him; no notice was taken of his exculpatory letter;

and he was forced to overcome his reluctance, and give his mother a concise statement of what had happened, and what he proposed to do.

This epistle fairly despatched, he felt as if a great step had been made towards a settlement of his affairs; and returned with fresh zeal to his arithmetical speculations. After the hundredth attempt to calculate the exact price of coals, and the amount of a twelvemonth's washing, he came to the conclusion that, with his reduced means, existence in England was an impossibility. So, like most people in distress, difficulty, disease, or disgrace, he decided upon going abroad. Without knowing enough of continental habits to form a very accurate estimate of the cost of living there, he had a general impression that money went much farther there than at home. He would avoid as much as possible the beaten track, and seek an asylum in some of the Italian towns, perhaps; where he might eat grapes under a cloudless sky, and go to the Opera every night for half-a-crown.

So strong is the ruling passion in the most penitent of breasts, that he might probably have gone on to imagine the sensation his blond complexion would create in that land of swarthy

cheeks, and to congratulate himself on the freedom from prejudice generally exhibited there with regard to matrimonial obligations, when a sudden stop was put to all his schemes by the arrival of Mrs. Desart's answer. It was a rambling epistle, in that style which immediately suggests a suspicion of joint authorship; but its drift was unmistakeable, and betrayed a firm resolution not to surrender a penny of the allowance Hyacinth had relinquished in her favour. After inveighing pretty handsomely against his "excessive folly in quarrelling with his own bread and butter," and enlarging upon the expenses of installation in a new abode, she went on:—

"We feel, moreover, that we could not conscientiously abet you in the scandalous course you are bent on adopting. To furnish you with facilities for living apart from your wife, would be to incur a grave responsibility, and make us, in some degree, parties to improprieties which we deplore. Mr. Desart's sacred character imperatively forbids his sanctioning such an arrangement; but he will undertake, if you like, to communicate with Anna, though he says he hates interfering in family squabbles.



However, to oblige you he will break through his rule, and tell Anna how sorry you are for having offended her, and that you cannot get on without her, and so forth. She must yield to his persuasions; which will be a great deal pleasanter than for you to be running about the world with a paltry hundred pounds in your pocket. Between ourselves, my dear boy, I think it was very absurd of her to go off in a huff as she did; when a woman of her age marries a young man like you, she ought to be prepared for his being a little wild. You did not tell me who it was she surprised you with—a lady of high rank I suppose, for no one else would have played so bold a game. I would ask you to come down here, and talk over the affair; but this place is so very dull.”

Hyacinth scarcely read through this letter, before he seized a pen, and indited a vehement protest against the proffered interference, which he did not hesitate to say, would be more galling than any privation he might be called on to endure. Setting aside the conscientious scruples of his reverend step-father, he re-stated in plainer terms, his present need of the income legally belonging to him, and in the tone of one

claiming his own, requested it might in future be paid to him as heretofore. Good advice, he said, he had had in plenty; what he wanted more, was cash.

In reply to his brief note, he received a formal missive from Mr. Desart, who explained his appearance on the scene, on the plea that he could not have his beloved wife harassed with a business correspondence, conducted in an unfilial spirit. He animadverted with edifying severity upon the consequences of self-indulgent habits, leading a man first to alienate the affections of his wife, and next to seek to despoil his mother; but this last atrocity the writer declared his determination to prevent.

"Why," he continued, "should the delicacy on which you lay so much stress, be practised at her expense? In retaining the yearly sum secured to you at your marriage, you are not robbing Mrs. Leycester, who would pay all the same, whether you dated your cheques from her house or from the Antipodes. If you had left her, the case might be different; but as she has chosen (with good reason, no doubt) to leave you, you are in no way bound to resign the settlement voluntarily made upon you. After

your uncourteous rejection of my kind offices, however, I cannot hope that my advice will have any weight with you. I merely warn you not to throw away, in a fit of pique, what properly belongs to you, reckoning on the support of an over-indulgent parent; for I will not suffer her and her young daughters to be impoverished for the sake of a selfish and profligate son. When your only choice is between absolute want, and what you are pleased to call meanness, we shall soon see which alternative you prefer."

Hyacinth experienced more humiliation than anger on perusing this epistle. To think that all his exalted ideas of independence should have dwindled into an ignoble dispute about money! that he should have given any one the power to address him in such strain! His temper, never violent, was so subdued by recent events, that he turned against himself the irritation others provoked, and half believed his own conduct as base as Mr. Desart pronounced it. For once in his careless life, the Epicurean had acted upon something like a moral impulse, and his whole circle of acquaintance was in arms against him; the worldly sneering at its folly, the pious condemning unreservedly its motives.

and results. Under the influence of what he at least mistook for generous emotion, he had reduced himself to actual penury; and no approving voice rewarded the sacrifice.

Heartily sick was he of the whole business, and a little ashamed of the enthusiasm which had hurried him into so undignified a position, whence there was no retreat. He could not now approach his wife, and say: "I acknowledge my faults, though they did not amount to crime; come back to me and test my sincerity," lest she should reply: "It is still my purse, not me, you seek. The garrison surrenders only when starved out." It did not require Mr. Desart's concluding sarcasm to show him the odious light in which his return to reason might be viewed; and though not prone to accept other people's opinions as his rule of life, he wanted energy just now to brave the world's criticism.

He did not dream of contesting his mother's right to withhold the allowance to which his father's will entitled him. He had made no formal transfer of it, and knew that she could not legally enforce observance of a purely voluntary agreement; yet backed by an unscrupulous husband, she might refuse to

admit his claim, and drive him into a court of law to compel payment; a measure, in the first place, tending to aggravate his pecuniary difficulties, and in the second, necessitating a sad exposure of family secrets.

What then remained? Too mild to proceed to extremities against his mother, too proud to seek reconciliation with his wife, how should he extricate himself from the toils his own hand had set? "Earn your bread," was the method hinted at in the document which had closed the last door against him. But the means? How was this dispossessed steward, who could not dig and to beg was ashamed, to retrieve of his fallen credit? He was too old now for the army and navy, every way unfitted for the Church; law and medicine demanded a long course of preparation, while the lighter arts of music and painting, for which he had some natural aptitude, would be remunerative only to talents of a high order. He thought for a moment of the golden regions, where the precious metal lies crying: "Come and pick me up;" but in one number of the *Times*, he read enough to deter him from seeking a fortune at the diggings. He felt that he was precisely one of those "help-

less victims of gentility" against which the Thunderer daily fulminated its anathemas; and had little inclination to swell the crowd of educated vagrants reduced to break stones on the roads of Melbourne.

"Crying peaches would not be so hard a lot," said he, laying down the paper containing a surgeon's adventures in that paradise of labouring men; "but I suppose they are not in season all the year round, even in Australia."

It was wise, perhaps, not to risk the unknown perils and hardships of so long a voyage; a move of less importance became, however, advisable. His stay at Ribbisham had already been prolonged beyond the ordinary limits of a visit, and he saw, or fancied he saw, unequivocal symptoms of exhausted hospitality on the part of his hosts.

"They are afraid I may quarter myself on them for good," thought he, with some bitterness, his uneasy circumstances rendering him unusually sensitive; and he hastened to relieve them of such fears by announcing his speedy departure. After a faint show of opposition, Rose accepted the event as a settled thing, and quietly asked him where he meant to go.

"My ultimate arrangements are still undecided," replied he carelessly. "In the meanwhile, as my mother's house in town is not let, I shall probably make use of it for a night or two."

"And your own house standing empty!" Rose ventured to remark.

"Leaves Ribbisham at 2·25—arrives . . . Yes, that is the train for me," muttered Hyacinth, absorbed in Bradshaw. "If you have any commissions, Rose, think them over, and let me know; I leave here to-morrow at a quarter past two."

When he informed his valet of his intention, Anderson replied, "Very well, Sir," with an alacrity which testified his readiness to obey the summons."

"You don't seem sorry to be off," observed Leycester, with a slight smile.

"Why no, Sir, I can't say I am; this place is very—quiet, Sir, very quiet. As you don't go till the afternoon, there will be plenty of time to pack up to-morrow. Can I do anything for you now, Sir?"

Hyacinth, who was sitting abstractedly looking into the fire, roused himself with an effort, and

said: "Stay, Anderson, I have another notice to give, which may as well be got over at once. It costs me much to tell you that you must carry your services elsewhere."

Glancing up at the man's face as he spoke, he saw such consternation depicted there, that he stopped abruptly.

"Sir!" ejaculated Anderson, "you are not serious? How have I had the misfortune to displease you?"

"Far from that, my good fellow; I part with you for no fault of yours, and with sincere regret, but I can no longer aff— I mean that circumstances oblige me at present to dispense with an attendant of your calibre. I— am contemplating a foreign tour of some extent, in parts where an English servant would be an impossible luxury. Anything you can suggest in the way of recommendation, I will gladly do for you. As my absence will probably be a protracted one, I will both leave you a written character, and mention you to Captain Lawrance and Mr. Dacre, to whom you can apply if a personal reference should be insisted on. You will not, I trust, have long to wait for another situation."

Anderson bowed and withdrew with a most



downcast expression of countenance. When his master retired for the night, he fidgeted about him, as if unwilling to leave the room, till at last he mustered courage to say :

"I hope you won't think it presuming, Sir, but if wages was any object, I would not stand out about them. There's other things makes a place valuable; and I'd go anywhere with you, Sir."

Hyacinth first opened his eyes wide, and then dropped their lids rather suddenly. His voice shook a little, as he answered :

"I am very sensible, believe me, Anderson, of the attachment you evince to my person; but common honesty forbids my taking advantage of it. Circumstances which I cannot explain compel me to deprive myself of your valued services. Nothing, I can assure you, but a positive necessity, would have induced me to adopt such a measure; but it cannot be avoided."

Anderson forbore to urge the matter further. Without arriving at a clear comprehension of the state of affairs, he had of course seen enough to convince him that there was a screw loose somewhere. His first impression, founded on an unfinished phrase of Hyacinth's, was that

some motive existed for retrenchment; hence his offer to remain at a reduced salary. At this second interview, it struck him that Mr. Leycester's mysterious movements might be connected with the veiled lady whom he had admitted to that gentleman's private apartments; and that he might be indiscreet in pressing himself too importunately upon a traveller who wanted no witness of the company he might frequent. Dreading therefore to commit a blunder, he contented himself with a sorrowful entreaty that if Hyacinth should again require an English valet, he would not forget his old follower—an engagement to which he readily assented.

“This man, who pulls off my boots, only quits me on compulsion; the wife who has slept by my side, deserts me without a sigh,” was Hyacinth's gloomy reflection, as he laid his head upon his lonely pillow.

At two o'clock the next day, when the rectorial chaise should have been brought round to convey the departing guest to the station, it was discovered that the reverend Sidney, with his wonted contempt for time and order, had driven it off to transact some arrears of business at a

distance whence there was no chance of his return before dusk.

"What is to be done?" cried Rose, her thoughts secretly reverting to the state of the larder.

"There's a 'Bus' as meets the train," suggested the handmaiden, who had brought intelligence of the empty stable.

"Which will do very well for me and the luggage, Sir, if you would prefer walking on to the station," said Anderson, anxious to spare his master the shock of jolting along in a curiously primitive vehicle, beside a butcher, or a ploughman redolent of the farm-yard.

"So be it," said Hyacinth, adding, with a forced smile, to his sister, as he turned to bid her adieu: "I shall save sixpence, I suppose, by walking. I would travel second-class, only I do not like my man to suspect the state of the exchequer."

Rose threw her arms round his neck. Perhaps her heart smote her for allowing him to go forth homeless into the world.

"You can come back to us, of course," said she, "if you don't find things comfortable where you're going. We are not very well off, as you

know; but if you should want any little assistance, I am sure Sidney—”

“Thanks, thanks,” interrupted Leycester, disengaging himself from her embrace. “I appreciate the kind intention, but it shall never be said with truth, that I diminished the slender resources of my family to nourish a spurious pride.”

## CHAPTER VI.

“Poor lord! is't I  
 That chase thee from thy country . . . . .  
 . . . . . and is't I  
 That drive thee from the sportive court, where thou  
 Wast shot at with fair eyes?”  
 ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

“Good society  
 Is no less famed for tolerance than piety,  
 That is, up to a certain point; which point  
 Forms the most difficult in punctuation.  
 Appearances appear to form the joint  
 On which it hinges in a higher station.  
 \* \* \* \* \*

I can't exactly trace their rule of right,  
 Which hath a little leaning to a lottery.  
 I've seen a virtuous woman put down quite  
 By the mere combination of a coterie;  
 Also a so-so matron boldly fight  
 Her way back to the world by dint of plottery.”  
 DON JUAN.

WHEN Mrs. Leycester left town, it was understood she was going to Hildhurst, where, she did in fact pass one night; but thinking that retirement to a spot so near at hand would look like a feint, intended merely to invite pursuit and remonstrance, she started early the next morning for Dover, and placed the Channel

between herself and repentance. Anxious only to escape from the scene of her troubles, and too much absorbed in them to give much attention to details, she left behind her no precise intimation of her probable route, and in her restless mood, changed it often enough to baffle a detective policeman. Capital cities and fashionable watering-places she carefully avoided: neither was she guided in her choice by the picturesqueness of the scenery. To a greater extent than is commonly believed, "Beauty is in the eye of the gazer," and to her disordered vision, which, dazzled with long dwelling on one object, saw nothing but confused repetitions of the image, the finest prospect was productive of no more pleasure than the most monotonous of poplar-bordered roads. She moved, ate, spoke, as if in a feverish dream, from which the sleeper vaguely hopes to wake.

As the tumult of her mind subsided, allowing her to look calmly back upon the past, and steadily forward to the future, she began, as Hyacinth had done before her, to question the wisdom of obeying her first impulse. She closed the third volume of "Stuart of Dunleath," which had been her travelling companion, to ponder

upon the maxim there so strongly laid down—that a woman in the upper classes never adds to her own credit or happiness by leaving her husband, whatever complaints she may have to allege against him. On comparing her own wrongs with the fictitious Lady Penrhyn's, she was startled to perceive on how much slighter provocation she had taken the extreme step, represented as so fatal to a wife's peace—not to say so injurious to her reputation.

What after all had driven her into a position which all law, society, prudence, and principle, combined to denounce? Neither personal violence, nor coarse and insulting language; no ungovernable temper, nor studied disregard of her feelings and wishes; no reckless waste of her substance; in short, no gross abuse of marital authority swelled the catalogue of her grievances. If her husband winced under the nuptial yoke, and deemed he had purchased wealth too dearly, she never heard him repine. If his attentions were at all times dictated rather by caprice than affection, his wayward humour never put her to the blush before strangers, nor led him to say or do anything that the touch of his lip could not speedily efface. She had never

seen him intoxicated, never knew of his being mixed up in any disreputable transaction; and there was nothing in his habits to offend the most fastidious taste. In opposition to all these negative merits, stood the one positive failing; and all his elegance, his amenity, his occasional tenderness, his invariable courtesy, proved unable to atone for open and repeated infidelity.

"I have borne much, I have refused conviction where doubt was possible; but there is a point at which credulousness approaches fatuity, and toleration becomes connivance." Thus reasoned Anna, when the scene in her husband's dressing-room was fresh in her memory, and her jealous fancy heightened the significance of every direct and indirect proof against him. Now that time and distance had exerted their usual softening influence, she began to ask herself whether this one solitary fault were really as grave or as well-established as she had taken for granted. The adulation he constantly received in female society, the sort of admiring indulgence with which he was regarded by his own sex, were quite enough to turn the head of an *enfant gâté* of twenty-four. Far from wondering at his being seduced into *liaisons*, more or



less intimate, with this or that reigning coquette, it was perhaps a truer cause of surprise that he had any virtue left for domestic use, and was not corrupted to the very heart's core.

The case, no doubt, wore, *primâ facie*, a suspicious aspect. Mrs. Bathurst had no possible business to be where she was found; Mr. Bathurst manifestly shared that opinion with Mrs. Leicester; Hyacinth, who was not wont to embroil himself with other people's differences, must have had some strong personal motive for his visible anxiety to promote a reconciliation between that couple. Still, would it not have been fairer to hear before condemning, to give the accused a chance of clearing up the mystery hanging over the transaction, and proving himself, if not faultless, yet less faulty than he might appear? The fact of his inviting her presence seemed inconsistent with guilt; he was surely not such a blunderer as to provoke a gratuitous exposure.

Then, too, his duel might have had other causes than the one imputed. Mr. Bathurst's temper was stern, his manner unprepossessing; he might not, perhaps, be temperate in the expression of his opinions, nor careful whose *amour*

*propre* he wounded. It was easy to conceive the disdain with which such a nature would look down upon a man of Hyacinth's stamp; the latter, though not a fire-eater, was far from tame; if therefore the contempt displayed itself offensively, the sequel was not difficult to comprehend. Mrs. Bathurst was evidently a person of no judgment, whose vanity had led her to misconstrue the motive of the quarrel.

In short, without pronouncing an absolute acquittal, Mrs. Leycester was almost prepared to retract her hasty verdict of guilty, when Hyacinth's letter, which had followed her half over Europe, reached her hands. Its effect was more powerful than the writer could have ventured to anticipate. The pathetic touches went straight to her heart, and rekindled the fondness that lay smouldering there. By its light she read and believed his declaration of innocence; while his haughty rejection of terms she had thought meanly of him for submitting to, restored him to the place he had forfeited in her estimation.

"It may be a twinge of conscience," whispered Suspicion; "he is not base enough to betray you, and yet live upon your bounty."

appeared to her an age, Anna began to fear that her advances had not been well received. She had perhaps abated too much of her dignity in yielding so readily to a first appeal, which might not after all have been sincere. She had read "Indiana," and trembled to think that her husband's pathos might have been purely imaginative. She knew the facility with which he not merely assumed a character, but worked himself into the state of feeling properly belonging to it; and worried herself with picturing his exultation at seeing her so speedily brought to his feet.

There was of course a chance that her letter had missed him, and was being passed from hand to hand like the one that had followed so devious a route to overtake her at Palerino. To terminate the intolerable suspense, she addressed herself at last to Mrs. Aguilar, begging to be informed whether Hyacinth were still her guest, and if not, in what direction he had bent his steps. In process of time, Rose wound herself up to the effort of replying that her brother had quitted the rectory "ever so long ago," with the intention of stopping a few days at his mother's house in town, and that no news of him had since been received.

"Mr. Dacre, who passed through Ribbisham the other day, says he should not be surprised if he is gone on the stage, as poor Cinthy was a first-rate private actor."

The phrase, from Dacre's lips, had a double significance which chimed in but too well with Anna's misgivings; yet, whether Hyacinth were sincere or not in his show of feeling, it was essential to his wife's repose to ascertain what had become of him.

Enquiries at Mrs. Desart's late abode in Brook Street were met by the intelligence that the missing gentleman had occupied an apartment there for several nights, more than two months back, and the housekeeper had no idea where he went afterwards, except a vague surmise of foreign parts.

All Captain Lawrance knew of him was that Anderson had left his service, and applied to himself to bear witness to his respectability, in confirmation of the written character left him by his late master. This looked as if Hyacinth had gone abroad; the valet could only add that he parted from Mr. Leycester in London, believing such to be his intention.

Application was next made to his mother, who returned a querulous answer, dilating much upon his unkind attempt to diminish her scanty funds (she had only about £800 a year, to keep herself and the two girls) and finally denied all knowledge of his subsequent proceedings.

Meagre as was the light this epistle threw upon the main point of Hyacinth's whereabouts, it furnished Anna with some food for reflection. Why should he have wished to disturb the existing settlement of his property? Had he not enough without dispossessing his mother of an odd hundred pounds? A casual visit to her banker dispelled Anna's perplexity on this head. Not a single cheque signed by Mr. Leycester had been presented: hence his patrimonial allowance became again his only means of subsistence, and that being refused him, how had he managed to live? It had not occurred to her before, that her husband was exposed to any actual inconvenience by his rejection of her liberality. The idea of his wanting not merely the luxuries in which he delighted, but perhaps the ordinary comforts of existence, did not, of course, lessen her anxiety to discover his hiding

place. She devised subtle advertisements, which should have a meaning for him, and for him only; and spared neither expense nor trouble in following up any clue that presented itself. Setting aside all minor considerations, she did not scruple to seek intelligence of him in any quarter where there was the remotest chance of obtaining it, and having exhausted other resources, she even went so far as to question some of his female friends concerning him.

Mrs. Fitzmaurice answered her carefully-worded enquiry with frankness, betraying no awkward sense of its peculiar signification.

"My dear Madam," wrote she, "if I had the least conception what has become of that very *mauvais sujet*, your husband, I would not hesitate to give you all the *renseignements* in my power. But I really have not seen him since a certain unfortunate event, and have heard nothing but what common rumour has brought to my ears. He has not vouchsafed me a line to indicate his movements. Mrs. Bathurst, perhaps, may know more of them. She has disappeared, I am told, from wherever it was she lived. What trouble and annoyance that person's indiscretion has caused! No well-bred woman would have so

hopelessly committed herself, and all connected with her.

“Wishing you every success in your search,

“I remain, dear Madam,

“Truly yours,

“CONSTANTIA FITZMAURICE.”

The one point in this billet that fixed Anna's attention, was the fact of Laura's disappearance, with the consequent question whether she had quitted her home to accept Hyacinth's protection. Mary Wentworth might be able to furnish the desired information; and to her Anna accordingly despatched a sketch of her present difficulty, beseeching aid. Mary wrote by return of post to express her sympathy and good-will.

“My intercourse with the Maynards,” she continued, “has slackened perceptibly since the answer I thought myself bound to give their brother's proposal. They impute it, of course, to any motive but the right, and regarding me as the cause of his hurrying into a marriage they did not approve, they blame me for the very act to which I appeal as my justification. Had I been prompt to take offence, the correspondence would long have dropped entirely;

but satisfied of the prudence of my conduct, I can afford to make allowances for their imperfect comprehension of it.

“When all the scandal about poor Laura became known here, papa immediately assumed the worst as proved, and forbade my having any further communication with ‘that abandoned woman.’ It was of no use to plead that she might have been momentarily led astray by ignorance of the world, and strong temptation, and yet have no unconquerable bent to either folly or vice. The answer was ready: ‘All weakness is wickedness; a married woman is convicted by the mere offer of such homage, which her own levity must have provoked. Let Eve once listen, and to look, to long, to touch, to taste, will follow in rapid succession.’ Mrs. Wentworth stops all further argument with the usual stupid cant about the impropriety of young ladies having any knowledge of or opinion upon such topics; as if at five-and-twenty one could still ignore the serpent’s entrance into many a domestic Eden since the first!

“To this false system, this over-restrained reserve, my poor friend’s errors may in part be attributed. I recollect well, that this same su-



perfidious Propriety was Mrs. Maynard's idol; her sole aim was to make her daughters well-behaved, not right thinking women. All exercise of the judgment was prohibited; the track to be followed had been already laid down; appeals to principle were discouraged; custom being deemed a safer guide for a female than conscience. Any attempt to bring the established order of things to the test of reason and justice, was stigmatised as presumption, or held to savour of eccentricity—than which Mrs. Maynard's vocabulary contained no reproach more dire.

“ Thus trained up in artificial innocence, a girl is married and launched upon the world; she attracts admiration, which, having never before been left to her own guidance; she knows not how to repel; she experiences sensations which had never been described to her, and cannot foresee the results of their indulgence. Finally, if hard pressed, having seen no distinction made between a first venial fault, and the last pitch of depravity, she either slides to the bottom of the ladder, believing herself all the while firmly stationed at the top, or, perceiving the descent begun, flings herself headlong down, in utter despair of recovering her lost position.

"What stage of culpability Laura Bathurst reached, I do not pretend to decide, but I think I can relieve her of much odium, and you of a serious apprehension, by stating that she is at this moment, and has been for some weeks past, residing with her family, awaiting in dreary suspense the restoration of her husband's confidence and the world's esteem. I would not utter one word that should by implication add to your heavy burden of trouble; but it does make one chafe sometimes to see fair fames tarnished, homes made miserable, all to gratify some man's vanity or idle caprice. If he sinned from genuine, even though illicit passion, I could pity while I condemned. When one of my too credulous sex (I will not say 'imbecile,' like the *renegade*, Georges Sand), falls a victim, not to love, but to unmitigated selfishness, and society raises its many voices to brand the deceived, instead of the deceiver, I am seized with a fierce disgust of the whole human race, and could almost echo Nero's wish to see it swept from the face of the earth."

This outbreak of wrath from the placid Mary rather astounded Mrs. Leycester, who, while admitting the general correctness of her niece's

sentiments, was disposed to lay a share of the blame on feminine coquetry. Yet taken from Mary's point of view, the case was not overstated, and warranted her indignation. Laura was wretched enough to excite the warmest sympathy among those who did not believe her guilty.

We have indicated the tumult of thoughts and feelings, which drove her at that memorable crisis to Leycester's door. Obeying a blind impulse, she had rushed, with no idea of treachery, into the enemy's camp. Once there, however, it would have been easy to detain her a not unwilling prisoner, either by representing her as compromised beyond redemption, or by the softer arts of persuasion. But a single glance of his revealed to her, with sudden distinctness, the mistake she had made as to his sentiments; courteously disguised as it was, his indifference was plainly perceptible.

The lesson was bitter, but salutary. She left the house, deeply impressed with the perils and mortifications besetting unlawful attachments, and almost cured of a love so little appreciated by its object. The halo faded from the head of of her deity, who from looking more than man,

began to be esteemed as less; and she now exaggerated the egotism, the insensibility which she had failed to penetrate and subdue. Taking her demolished idol to pieces, and examining it bit by bit, she wondered what charm had hung round it to delude her senses; and winced at the remonstrance of her infatuation, as people do who have yielded too easy credit to a clever impostor.

It would not have been difficult for Mr. Bathurst at this time to recover his lost influence, and even to gain a hold which he had never yet possessed upon his wife's affections. By magnanimously overlooking what had been amiss in her conduct, he would have acquired a title to her lasting gratitude, besides exhibiting his own character in a most favourable light.

She would have spared no effort to atone for past errors, and justify the indulgence with which she was treated. Who shall say, moreover, that, having now been taught to love, as well as weaned from a misdirected partiality, she would not have sought as legitimate occupant of the vacant throne, and given her husband that place in her heart which he had neglected at an earlier period to secure? There is the highest

authority for expecting great attachment from those to whom much has been forgiven; and if a sentiment based on such grounds, is not precisely the one a husband most covets to inspire, it is probably more durable than the bright flame kindled by the senses, or the feeble spark struck out (so to speak) by the friction of habitual contact.

But, unfortunately for both, Mr. Bathurst was endowed neither with natural generosity, nor with acquired knowledge of the sex, which would have served his turn almost as well. In receiving back his wife at Leycester's suggestion, he had yielded, as she had done before him, to the magic accents of the young man's voice; but viewed the transaction in less glowing colours as soon as reason resumed her calm sway. It was not so much that he fell back upon his doubts of Laura's honesty; Mrs. Leycester's presence on that memorable occasion had reassured him considerably upon that point; but suspicion is a spreading plant, not easy to be eradicated; gifted too, with a vitality not belonging to the fairer products of the soil. He could not forget the pleasure Laura had taken in another's society, the public way in which her name had been

coupled with that other, the annoyance he had suffered on her account; while in the background, still loomed a chance that he had been deceived; and on this possible past he often brooded to the exclusion of all care for the future.

The result was unsatisfactory in every way. A man has no middle course in such a situation; if he distrusts his wife's fidelity, he degrades himself by condoning the offence—let him withdraw from the association: if, on the other hand, he is not convinced (or does not choose to convince himself) of her unworthiness, he owes her at least the tolerance due to an untried prisoner, and should abstain from extra-judicial rigors which he has no warrant to inflict. According to this rule, Mr. Bathurst might have refused, with some show of equity, to harbour a companion whose frailty appeared to him sufficiently demonstrated; but by restoring her to her place in his household, he virtually acquitted her of guilt, and it was both unfair and impolitic to act towards her afterwards upon the contrary presumption.

It seemed as if, in taking her home, he had exhausted all the benevolence of which he was

capable, and conceived himself entitled to balance that mark of condescension by the harshness of his subsequent behaviour. He conducted himself on all occasions with the sort of grim urbanity an upright old courtier might display towards a prince whose rank he respected, while disapproving his actions; exercised the strictest surveillance over her smallest proceedings, and allowed her in a hundred ways to feel herself disgraced and humiliated.

While such was his demeanour in private, he took no pains to shield her from censorious tongues, esteeming it perhaps a wholesome discipline for her to learn experimentally with what horror the respectable part of the community regarded the "flirtation" in which she had been engaged. Deprived of his support, which could alone have silenced malicious gossip, poor Laura's position became insupportably painful. The ladies of her acquaintance drew up at her approach, and shrank from her as if she had the plague. She had been "talked about!" This was quite enough for spotless Christians, who went twice to Church on Sundays, and must therefore have often heard the words reported by St. Matthew: "Judge not, that ye be not

judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

But worse than the cold looks of these exemplary persons, was the tone assumed by the coarser-minded of the other sex, who seemed to think no freedom could be taken amiss by one who was not proof against every temptation. Nor were her tribulations confined to her own class; for if she ventured into any place of public resort, Hyacinth's male friends stole curious glances, while the women stared openly at the heroine of one of his gallant adventures. He was so well known that the affair obtained more than common notoriety; so that Laura at last was afraid to enter a shop lest she should be pointed out as "the Mrs. Bathurst who got Cinthy Leycester into trouble."

Perhaps, with the vanity of misfortune, she exaggerated her unenviable prominence in the public mind; but imaginary griefs are not the least disagreeable to bear, and she was glad to find in the state of her health an excuse for seeking the shelter of the maternal roof. There she hoped to escape the finger of scorn, the tattle of calumny, though she had to dread her father's anger, and her mother's lamentations over her



giddiness, besides the averted looks, it might be, of some who had known her in happier days.

It was with a sad heart and a crushed spirit she returned to the scenes of her girlhood, which she had quitted not two years ago in all the careless hilarity of an easy conscience and an unawakened soul, the book of life open before her at what young women consider its brightest page, mistaking, as they are apt to do, the close of one chapter for the *dénouement* of the tale. Few fears had disturbed her breast on undertaking that GREAT EXPERIMENT in which she had so signally failed. It had seemed so easy a thing to float down the long vista of time, performing punctually a certain round of duties, enjoying soberly a moderate amount of gaiety, keeping house, and rearing children, "suckling fools, and chronicling small beer." Yet here she was, already stranded on a desolate shore, with so little prospect of assistance in remedying the disaster that it might almost as well have been a total wreck.

On whom rested the blame of this untoward interruption of her anticipated career? On herself, or her husband? Mr. Leycester, or destiny?

Of the rectitude of her own intentions she felt so assured, that had the secret not exploded when it did, she believed her wave-beaten vessel would have righted itself, and no damage have befallen cargo or crew. There was no ground for accusing Mr. Bathurst of causing the catastrophe. It was no fault of his that his wife did not know her own mind, and discovered after marriage, essentials to her happiness which she had not perceived to be wanting in him before.

Was Leycester then chargeable with the whole responsibility? Mrs. Bathurst hesitated before giving the answer. Tender recollections were creeping back to her memory by many channels; chilled and hurt by Mr. Bathurst's stern implacability, she recalled with fresh stirrings of regret the evidences of his rival's gentler disposition, and inclined to the doctrine that laxity of principle might be atoned for by an easy temper. In her dreams she saw again the winning graces, heard the soft tones which had converted dislike into admiration, coquettish hostility into friendship, only too warm and profound. After all, she had no right to accuse him of deliberate perfidy; he might have had no evil design in

paying her the little attentions so willingly accepted by other ladies. Her ignorance of the world had probably led her to attach undue importance to his civilities, while her husband's ill-founded jealousy had given a more serious turn to the affair than it would ever have taken without his interference.

How did she denounce the injustice of public opinion, which passed over with amiable obtuseness the misconduct of daring sinners, and condemned with unsparing rigour the slightest unsteadiness in unhardened culprits like herself! There was Mrs. Fitzmaurice for instance; Laura had heard her *liaisons* with Hyacinth, with Lord Wells—aye, and with others beside them, alluded to as openly as the political events of the day; yet this woman kept her station in society, enjoyed all the advantages derivable from the wealth and position of the husband whose hearth she profaned, besides receiving an amount of homage from the male sex, which would never have been bestowed upon a strictly virtuous woman, how great soever her charms and accomplishments. Whereas Laura, for a single indiscretion, for merely admitting Mr. Leycester's rather too frequent visits, appearing

occasionally in public on his arm, and allowing him once or twice to furnish the bouquet she carried (for she had *done* no more, and the world had no concern with her private sentiments), was frowned upon by the decorous, villified by the ill-natured, distrusted by her husband, and universally contemned.

"I might as well be guilty as have the credit of it," was the not unnatural tendency of her reflections. "I should at least have enjoyed 'the pleasures of sin for a season.' A clear conscience is poor support under this load of unmerited obloquy."

One ray of comfort alone sustained her through these sore trials; to avoid a second disappointment of her already deferred maternal hopes, she suppressed the violence of her grief, and trusted that happiness might yet smile upon her from the face of her child.



tried in vain, Anna's mind fastened upon the forlorn hope that Laura might have some inkling of his movements, derived, if not directly from himself, yet from some of the numerous channels open to a person on the spot at the time, whose sagacity was quickened by a powerful interest.

The chance was a feeble one; but in the absence of any other, she could not rest while it was untried. After much hesitation, therefore, she wrote to Mrs. Bathurst, apologising for the insinuation conveyed in the enquiry, but entreating her if she had any knowledge of Hyacinth's present abode, to ease the writer's mind by communicating it.

"I will make no use of the secret," she continued; "I will not attempt to see him or to influence his proceedings; but if you can assure me that he is alive and well, I implore you not to let false delicacy prevent your doing so charitable an action. If you love him, you can appreciate my feelings under a separation almost more harrowing than if it had been effected in the natural way by death."

Laura, in reply, earnestly repudiated the supposition that she was cognizant of Hyacinth's

affairs, and entreated Mrs. Leycester to bear her no ill-will on his account. "I had never seen any one like him before," so she wrote; "my foolish head was turned with his skilful flatteries, and I did not know the penalty attached to the honor of his notice. Rash as I may have been in not checking an intimacy which was so cruelly misconstrued, I beg you not to class me with those heartless women who delight in troubling the peace of families, or, at any rate, are indifferent to the misery they create. I never desired to tamper with Mr. Leycester's constancy, and have no reason to suspect him of any more serious intention than to amuse himself for a while at my expense. You may surely trust my sincerity in making a confession not particularly gratifying to my *amour propre*. I might perhaps complain of the levity by which my reputation has been endangered, my domestic comfort destroyed; but to you it may be consolatory to be assured that he was wholly free from sentimental weakness on my account. If you do not hold that place in your husband's affections which you ought to occupy, it is not I who have supplanted you."

"Poor thing!" sighed Mrs. Leycester, touched

by the subdued bitterness of tone running through this epistle, and testifying more plainly than words could do, that the writer's "weakness," had been met by less gratitude than she expected. "Poor thing! I am afraid Cinthy must have encouraged her little partiality, whether or not he cared to profit by it. Those bright eyes of his were quick to note the impression he made; and I know too well the charm he could throw into them when it suited his purpose. It would really seem, however, that in this case matters did not go so far as I imagined."

Miss Wentworth, who was again Anna's guest, did not share that lady's extreme disquietude on her husband's behalf. She had never regarded Hyacinth with much favour, and the distress he had brought upon her two best friends did not tend to mitigate her prejudices against him. His letter she admitted to be a pretty piece of composition, but it might have been thrown off as an artistic finish to the business, with no deeper sentiment than an author experiences in adding the last pathetic touches to his story. While Anna was consuming her days in fruitless researches, her nights in remorseful tears, he was possibly applauding his own cleverness in



getting rid of the wife who had stood in the way of his pleasures, yet keeping open a door of reconciliation, should his present mode of life fail to satisfy. He would be sure to cast up, Mary opined, whenever his resources were exhausted.

Mrs. Leycester also cherished a faint hope that he might come back some day of his own accord. A sudden ring at the door would bring a strange expectant look into her eyes, and once a week, at least, she rose with a "strong presentiment" that news of him would reach her before night. Mary grew sometimes almost impatient of the tenderness with which her aunt clung to his memory.

"She is much better without him," decided the young lady, "if she could only be brought to think so. Instead of being worried by his caprices, and burdened with the task of keeping him amused, she is now entirely mistress of her time and fortune, and has no one's wishes to consult but her own."

A most sensible theory, utterly opposed to the known tendencies of human nature, as are not a few other doctrines constituting the creed of *sensible* people. For who but the most narrow-

mind of egotists ever placed happiness in the concentration of every faculty on one's self? What woman, especially, but finds her highest joy in becoming a mere satellite to some other's existence, merging in him her desires, tastes, habits, even to her distinct individuality, when she takes his name? From her cradle to her grave, in fact, she is distinguished only by a relative appellation, and is known as M. or N., daughter of the Rev. So-and-So, until she passes into M. or N., wife of Somebody Else, Esq.

Our young friend, however, being yet a spinster, and oppressed with an unrequited attachment which she was doing her utmost to extinguish, may be excused for not comprehending the marvellous tenacity with which a heart, once wholly surrendered, will retain its allegiance, as a vase, once thoroughly imbued with perfume, *longum servabit odorem*. In her, the reason was more powerful than the imagination; but then the case on which she moralised was not her own, and that makes a considerable difference in every one's philosophy. Moreover, she was herself not quite so rational as she wished Anna

to be; for she treasured up in secret a pencil sketch of a gentleman whose conduct to her was thought by some of her friends not wholly unimpeachable, while she mourned over Mrs. Leicester's semi-adoration of her libertine husband's portrait.

Even as a work of art, however, the said picture claimed admiring notice. Most happily had the painter treated a very difficult subject; for, while Hyacinth's ever-varying expression almost defied the attempt to fix it on canvass, a mere servile copy of his features would have given no idea of his peculiar beauty. Eschewing the common-place red curtain or stone balustrade as a back-ground, the artist represented him leaning against the mantel-piece; the *abandon* of the attitude was eminently characteristic of him, as well as the look, half acute, half *nonchalant*, with which he seemed to regard the spectator. The hair, the complexion, and above all, the hands were faithfully represented; and the details of the dress were sufficiently elaborated to be recognisable, without standing out in undue prominence. While his valet would have identified the coat he wore, his friends all exclaimed:

"That's just Cinthy's lounge!" and connoisseurs who had never seen him would have confidently pronounced the likeness a good one.

Mary, who knew no better way of combating her aunt's regrets than by depreciating the amount of her loss, took occasion to insinuate that the pictured Hyacinth was no bad substitute for the living man; since it represented, under their brightest aspect, the external advantages which were his chief (not to say his only) merit, while its fair surface was not liable to be obscured by clouds of temper, nor corroded by fumes of vice. This, however, was a strain of argument in which Anna could not be induced to acquiesce.

"You never did him justice, Mary," she would assert. "Deceived by the veil of fantastic nonsense he chose to wear, you did not look beneath, and failed to recognise his real superiority. Society, to save itself the trouble of forming an opinion, is often content to accept a man at his own valuation. To have the credit of being a great beauty, a model of piety, a wit, philosopher, or artist, it frequently suffices to adopt the style and title of one with adequate boldness and perseverance; and my poor Hya-

cinth was set down in many quarters as an empty coxcomb, merely because he did not put forward clamorously enough his claims to any worthier designation."

"Yet the popular voice is reckoned tolerably correct in the main."

"In the main, it is correct. Few, I believe, go down to posterity under false colours. The test of employment soon disposes of hollow pretensions to valour, or ability; and the next generation will certainly refuse to admire paragons who have been puffed into undue celebrity in this. But I was speaking of a narrower sphere, and in the drawing-room circle I do maintain that the honours are often to the most confident, not to the most deserving. Do we not constantly hear mediocre singing applauded to the echo, when the performer displays the requisite *aplomb*? Have you not noticed the ready laugh which greets the feeblest pleasantry of a reputed jester, while the most brilliant sallies from unpatented lips fail to raise a smile? Defects are assumed quite as lightly as capacity; a careless or spiteful word, transmitted from mouth to mouth, acquires a force which there is no resisting; and you may be

branded for life as a fool, a flirt, a coward, or a shrew, for no other reason than that 'somebody said so'!"

"Am I to understand, then, that Mr. Leicester was the victim of misrepresentation?" asked Mary, dryly.

"You are to believe me, my love, when I tell you that the world was right in calling him a fop, but wrong in concluding him to be nothing more. I am not blind to his follies, I cannot altogether acquit him of grave faults; yet there was such a fund of amiability in his nature, so much that was engaging in his daily deportment, that often as I have repented becoming his wife, I never feel ashamed of having loved him."

"Pity that such affection should be wasted on one who, if not unworthy, was at least ungrateful!" ejaculated Mary.

"Perhaps no after devotion," returned Mrs. Leicester, "could make amends for the injury I did Hyacinth in marrying him. What right had I, a woman already past my prime, to enchain to mine his young existence, debarring him from the legitimate gratification of the desires natural to his age, and robbing his

future of all that should have reconciled him to the loss of his youth!"

"The injury, methinks, was of his own seeking."

"True; but the man who has of his own accord concluded a bad bargain, cherishes no very friendly feelings towards the person who profits by the transaction. In linking my fate with Mr. Leycester's, I committed a great mistake; not that I was fool enough to expect the transports of a lover from one so much my junior; I was not infatuated to that extent. My error lay, not in believing myself mistress of his whole heart, but in supposing I could be satisfied with less. I thought I should find my happiness in contributing to his; that the pleasure of living so close to him, seeing him daily, of being something to him, in short, would be an ample reward for all the care I meant to take of him, all the material benefits it was in my power to bestow. If I could have effected this without assuming his name, I declare to you I would have done so; but the rules of society imperatively forbade my endowing him with my wealth except in return for

his hand; and once his wife, I discovered that my love was less unselfish than I had fancied it. I strove hard against jealousy; I do not think I worried him by needless susceptibility; but I attached such value to his least gesture, that I certainly grudged each word, each smile, not addressed to me. I watched him, not to surprise his glances, but to see on what his eyes rested: I listened, not to overhear what he said, but because, amid all other sounds, his voice always reached my ear. With my whole being thus absorbed in his, you may conceive how keenly alive I was to the most trifling proofs of his indifference. Though prepared to meet such a return, I could not reconcile myself to it, nor calmly resign a hope against which my reason protested. Ah! Mary, if it be a sore trial for a warm and virgin heart to find its treasures wasted upon one of stone, not of flesh, how much more grievous is it to discover that another's breath can animate the marble which yours has no power to move, another's touch draw melody from the strings you have not skill to sweep; in short, that all earth holds of bliss lies in the gift of one bound to you by the closest ties, yet is not for you?"



This avowal of a passion greatly transcending her more sober conceptions so staggered Miss Wentworth, that she hardly knew how to reply. Pursuing her own train of thought, Mrs. Leicester continued, without noticing her silence :

“ You are not to suppose that Hyacinth brutally paraded his coldness before my eyes. It would perhaps have been happier for me in the end had he shown less consideration for my feelings, and by an utter want of kindness and delicacy, blunted the edge of my affection. I should then have endured but the pang of disenchantment, and soon have cooled down to his own pitch. But he never allowed me to subside into apathy, much less furnished me with cause for aversion. Gleams of fondness occasionally cheered my sinking spirits; and whether from a generous impulse, or, as I have sometimes feared, in pure wantonness, to rivet his chains, he never gave offence that he did not speedily atone for by some new species of fascination. To be angry with him long was impossible; he had as many endearing wiles as a child.”

“ It was not then a first quarrel that induced you to break away from him so suddenly ?” said

Miss Wentworth thoughtfully. "You had forgiven much before you were driven to that extreme step?"

"I was worked up to a high pitch of exasperation by his seeming duplicity," answered Anna; "and knew not how often I might previously have been deceived. His illness prevented the explanation that would have set matters right between us; but wrathful as I was, and upheld by a persuasion of the dignified part I was playing, it was only after a hard struggle I tore myself from his side, nor could I trust my firmness to let him know my purpose until remonstrance was of no avail. This will show you that our previous differences had not sufficed to wean me from my partiality. I do not pretend to say that things always went smoothly; but with all his faults, Hyacinth had none of those petty vices which wear out the patience, and keep one in a state of chronic irritation."

"And his temper?" enquired Mary. "He looked good-humoured; but those soft-spoken gentlemen can sometimes be as perverse, and even as violent as coarser souls. You recollect Mr. Le Marchant, who married a cousin of mine? He appeared one of those easy, placid

mortals, who scarcely possess a will of their own; yet I have heard of his flinging crockery at his wife's head!"

"I never witnessed any similar excesses on Hyacinth's part," said Mrs. Leycester, smiling: "and I really think the habitual self command essential to good-breeding would have restrained him from such outrageous proceedings, even had he been of a more choleric disposition. But he was the gentlest of human beings; and this was the more praiseworthy in him, seeing that he had warm blood in his veins, and not milk-and-water, like some of the mild inanities one meets. Uncertain in all else, variable in his moods as the sea, wayward, volatile, incapable, as it seemed, of fixed resolve or serious reflection, he was always true to himself in this one respect, and took more pains to avoid hurting the feelings of those submitted to his sway, than many persons of higher moral pretensions. In the twelve months we lived together, I never saw him thoroughly upset but once, and then the fit was short-lived."

"And what disturbed his wonted equanimity?"

"A mere trifle, a few heedless words which

would appear totally inadequate to have produced such an effect, did we not know the incalculable mischief the smallest spark may do if it light among combustible materials. It was here, last autumn, when we had the house full of company, Mr. Dacre, Mrs. Fitzmaurice—”

“Mrs. Fitzmaurice!” interrupted Mary in surprise.

“I was not then aware of the intimacy said to have existed between her and my husband,” pursued Mrs. Leycester, “and I must do him the justice to say that he neither gave nor instigated the invitation. In fact she invited herself; with what motive, it is needless now to enquire. Well, we were all in this room one day, just after lunch, and Mrs. Fitzmaurice was bantering Cinthy about his hair, declaring that some miraculous virtue must reside therein, for he set as much value on it as Sampson on his, and had never been known to give a shred away. In disproof of which assertion, he offered her as much as she chose to have, and taking up my scissors, prepared to cut off a great piece. I started up exclaiming:—‘No, no, Cinthy, these locks are my property, and I won’t have them cropped to

please anybody!' I spoke jestingly, but Mrs. Fitzmaurice seemed to resent my interference. 'Yours, are they?' cried she in a sarcastic tone, 'by right, pray, of conquest or of purchase?' Mr. Dacre laughed rather significantly; whether the others did so I know not, for Hyacinth, stung, as I suppose, by the taunt implied in the word purchase, shook off my hand impatiently, and cast at me a glance so fierce, so vindictive, that I stood aghast. It flashed from his blue eyes with the glare of forked lightning, and gave me a sensation of actual physical pain, as if he had struck me. He must have felt the glow of the lurid fire which shot from beneath his eyelids, for he dropped them instantly, though not before Mrs. Fitzmaurice had caught the expression of his countenance. 'Oh, fie, Mr. Leicester,' said she, holding up her finger in a chiding way. He recovered himself with astonishing rapidity, rose quickly, and went to the glass, exclaiming in his natural manner:—'By Jove! I am very glad I was stopped in my destructive career; the loss of that curl would have been a grievous disfigurement. I'll buy some for you, Mrs. Fitzmaurice, if you really want such a remembrance of me.'

And then a move was made, and the party dispersed for the afternoon."

"What gross injustice!" interrupted Mary; "If he had any cause of complaint at all, it was against Mrs. Fitzmaurice, and not against you."

"Nothing certainly was farther from my thoughts," said Mrs. Leycester, "than to annoy him by any assumption of proprietorship. A vague instinct of jealousy may have imparted unnecessary asperity to my protest, but no one could be more surprised than I was at the turn given to my unlucky speech. That look, the first and only one of ungentle meaning I received from my husband, will never fade from my memory. You would accuse me of exaggeration if I told you how many tears it has wrung from me at different periods. A new fear sprang up within me, that my very love for him made him ridiculous in other persons' eyes. I was quite impervious myself to the witticisms launched at an old fool who takes a boy-husband; but this incident shewed plainly that he was more sensitive, and when I reflected that this was probably not a solitary specimen of the *persiflage* he had to encounter, I marvelled that he had never vented

his displeasure upon me before. Another perplexing consideration was, how I should behave towards him when next we met. The case hardly admitted of explanation or apology; caresses might be repelled, yet, in default of one or other of these, a permanent breach might be made between us."

"Yes, those unacknowledged quarrels are always the most difficult to heal," observed Mary. "Strictly speaking, it was his place to make the *amende* to you, but that is a stretch of magnanimity of which but one husband in five hundred is capable."

"I shall remind you perhaps of that assertion," said Anna, with a triumphant smile. "But to continue. A neat little expostulatory discourse, which I prepared in solitude, died upon my tongue at the critical moment of delivery, so that not finding in myself the courage to speak to the point, or the skill to affect an unconcern I did not feel, I kept out of his way as much as possible. The evening seemed to me insufferably long and tedious; I was thankful when the hour came for retiring. Unobserved, as I flattered myself, I slipped out of the drawing-room with the rest of the ladies, but soon

perceived he was following us, as his custom was, to open the ante-room door. There was no avoiding him now! Mrs. Fitzmaurice, who had been in high spirits all the evening, stopped to shake hands a second time, prolonging the operation somewhat longer than was absolutely necessary. Then my turn came. He did not offer me the palm she was so slow to relinquish, but nodded graciously, and in his softest voice, said '*Au revoir.*' Mrs. Fitzmaurice turned sharply round, with a strange look upon her face, which I did not then comprehend. I understood, afterwards, that Cinthy's cordial tone was meant for her ear as much as mine, and that as far as she was concerned, it repaired the wrong of which she was likewise the sole witness."

"A smile for a frown!" said Mary half ironically, "that was the extent of the reparation you obtained from your paragon."

"Not quite, Sceptic," returned Mrs. Leycester. "Hear me out; I dismissed my maid as soon as possible, and waited rather nervously for the promised *tête-à-tête*. What line he would take I had not the least idea; he never did anything like any one else. I heard him come up-



stairs, and go into his dressing room, and by and bye he came in the most *recherché* déshabille. Yes, my dear," continued Anna, in answer to Mary's mute astonishment, "those who never saw that renowned exquisite in undress, have no conception of the lengths to which he carried his coquetry. In town, in society, he thought it bad style to affect singularity; he did not share the mania which possesses some young men, of accumulating clothes of strange texture and device; but on his own premises he gave the reins to his imagination. His taste was for luxury rather than show. So, for instance, he was very sparing of jewellery, but always wore silk stockings; his waistcoats were of the simplest description, his dressing gown was velvet; and while in public he rather eschewed embroidered shirts (since our butler adopted them), he slept under a breastplate of needlework that would have served for an infant's christening frock."

"I should pronounce that very effeminate," observed Mary; "but you have not told me how he made his peace."

"It was soon done," answered Anna. "He walked straight up to the fire-place where I was sitting, bent over me, and kissed my eyelids,

which, I fear, were rather red; then planting himself upon the little sofa beside me, he laid his head on my shoulder, and said quietly, 'Kiss mine, they burn.' I complied, with the full though tacit understanding that in so doing I sealed his pardon."

"And was no further reference ever made to the point?"

"Not in plain terms; some time afterwards I found in my work-basket this locket, enclosed in a paper on which was written, 'A free gift;'" and detaching the ornament from her chatelaine, Anna showed a lock of light brown hair. "I had the words engraved inside the cover."

"It is very pretty," said Mary as she gave it back, "and so is the whole story. Yet I cannot help fancying that in your place I should have preferred a more straightforward sort of reconciliation. Mr. Leycester, perhaps, exercised a wise discretion in committing cause to his eyes rather than his tongue; but I fear the subtle meaning you found in his glances would have been lost upon my duller perceptions."

"Not if you had loved him, Mary. An habitual concentration of the faculties upon one object will impart a singular power, such as

clairvoyants boast, of following the operation of that person's mind, reading his thoughts as they arise, and interpreting the unspoken language of his looks and gestures. Hyacinth's fitful temperament rendered him a peculiarly difficult subject, but by close and patient study I attained so much knowledge that of late I seldom failed to divine what made him smile or sigh. But enough of myself and my concerns; tell me now, dearest, something of your own. Have you never repented your stern rejection of Mr. Maynard?"

"No, aunt," said the young lady firmly. "Whatever regrets may at times have crept in, I have never wavered in my judgment as to the wisdom of my decision. The precipitation with which he engaged himself to another, so—so different from me, was a convincing proof that I did not possess any real hold over his affections. In thus contrasting Miss Leycester with myself," added she, quickly, "I do not wish to depreciate her; I merely mean that, had there been anything in my manners or character to rivet his esteem, he would not have transferred it instantaneously to a lady of totally opposite disposition."

"That might be true if men became ena-

moured of good qualities in the abstract, and not of the actual woman possessing, or supposed to possess them. But Mr. Arthur was not the person to love philosophically, or to pine very long. What seems fickleness may only have been a strong desire to attach himself somewhere. My private opinion still is, that the match would have turned out a happy one; for you, because he was really an amiable fellow, and if united to a judicious partner, would, I believe, have proved a faithful and affectionate husband; for him, because you were just the wife he wanted, and would have had the sense to choose, but for that unfortunate infatuation for my fair sister-in-law. How much better would it have been for him, if not for you both, had you taken him at his word, and married him when he asked you."

"Do they not then get on well together?" asked Mary.

"I fear not," replied Mrs. Leycester. "I saw some of Eglantine's earlier letters, written in a peevish, discontented spirit, which augured ill for her husband's comfort. Even when they were here soon after their marriage, I thought she taxed his patience rather severely, for she

was excessively exacting of attention, yet little grateful for it when bestowed."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Miss Wentworth. "He deserved a better fate than to be henpecked, or have his naturally cheerful temper soured by perpetual worrying. It will be his wife's own fault if she is not happy with him."

"Yet you would not trust yourself to his care!" observed Anna, smiling. "Seriously, Mary, I should like to know your ideal of a husband. You despise my Sultan for being soft, and admire Mr. Maynard, who is at least equally deficient in masculine energy; you flout at my exalted notions of love, and refuse your most favoured suitor for not being sufficiently devoted to you. Where do you draw the line between romance and rational expectation?"

"You want to entangle me in a definition," answered Mary, smiling also; "but my talent does not lie that way. If I were to give the result of my observations on married life generally, I should say that this love, which the young covet and the old ridicule, is just the jam in which the bitter pill of matrimony is wrapped. The sweetness in both cases is deceptive and transitory; but without that disguise the drug

would never be swallowed. When I see the cruel disappointments which too often await the best-founded hopes, I am inclined to rejoice at my escape from so many trials and troubles, and hug myself in spinster security."

"You may be right," said Mrs. Leycester, after a pause: "but at your age few put the tempting cup from their lips without a desire to taste it. You yourself, I am sure, would not be content to pass through life ignorant of its chief joy?"

"We never are contented," replied Mary, suppressing a sigh; "but since the rapture so quickly fades into dull satiety, four or five years hence I shall be as well off as those who have experienced it. If my noonday should appear rather sombre and colourless, I have but to imagine it evening, and that the sun has shone, and set:

'To this complexion we must come at last.'"

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Mine eyes  
Were not in fault, for she was beautiful."  
CYMBELINE.

"An unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd."  
MERCHANT OF VENICE.

MRS. LEYCESTER was not at all mistaken in her estimate of Arthur Maynard's matrimonial prospects. With every desire to make his wife happy, and most of the qualities that should have ensured success, the result proved a lamentable failure, while his own peace was wrecked in the attempt. Deeply smitten with the charms of "the pretty Miss Leycester," (which had been Eglantine's distinguishing title, for Rose was handsome, Violet beautiful, and Veronica lovely), he thought himself indeed a fortunate man when he drove from the church-door with her as his bride. A few weeks sufficed to dispel the illusion. He did not yet confess, even to himself, that he was weary of

that never-changing smile; he did not yet fume at the multitude of small services required of him; but through the halo his fancy had thrown over her, unpleasing traits of character already began to peep.

The first thing that shook his faith in his blooming divinity, was her behaviour to his family. She patronised his sisters, showed no deference to his parents, carped at the old-fashioned ways of the household, and treated the country neighbours with a supercilious condescension, that provoked much hostile criticism. Towards him, her conduct was marked by caprice and affectation; she was childishly jealous of every one he looked at or spoke to, and complained loudly of having no influence over him, while she wholly neglected the means by which such influence is to be secured. The young ladies found it difficult to "get on" with her, not being able to discover any subject in which she took a lively interest; she could play two or three set pieces, but had no turn for music; her reading was confined to the mere froth of the circulating library; work she abhorred, and as she was no walker, and could not ride, the surrounding country supplied few



resources. To sit, gorgeously dressed, on a sofa, appeared her chief business in life; and, except when finding fault with her husband, nothing stimulated her into animation but the prospect of a ball. There she was in her element; satisfaction made her loquacious; no distance deterred, no exertion fatigued her; and viewed under that radiant aspect, no one asked what Arthur Maynard had seen in her to admire.

It was not until the last Christmas festivity was over, and the young couple were fairly embarked on their long voyage, that a serious misgiving arose in the mind of either as to the result of the GREAT EXPERIMENT they had so readily undertaken. Twenty-four hours on board ship convinced the lady that marriage was a mistake, and she the most miserable of women. Her repinings almost took the form of an accusation against her husband of having married her on false pretences; and all his efforts to soothe and console her were met with sullen indifference or angry scorn. He, on his side, was frequently called from his fretful wife to quell a rising insubordination among his men, rendered fractious by confinement and want of

occupation; and, to crown all, the captain of the ship was so attached to the bottle that no one lay down in security under his guidance.

When, after a protracted and anxious voyage, the shores of Bermuda were safely reached, some amelioration took place in Arthur's circumstances. The pleasant change of climate, the novelty of the scene, the excitement of making a sensation among the garrison by her beauty, among the female population by the elegance and variety of her attire, combined to raise Eglantine's spirits, and restore the good humour, which with her was purely a physical affair. Arthur gladly forgot all previous exhibitions of impatience, and trusted that henceforth his domestic sky would be serene.

Vain hope! Eglantine's was essentially a frivolous nature, requiring the constant stimulus of gaiety and admiration. Intellectual pleasure, duty, sentiment, were terms that had no meaning for her; marriage implied a change of name, an accession of consequence, an establishment of her own, power to dispense with a chaperone; if she had any idea connected with it besides these, it may be briefly summed up in the word—diamonds. The match for her would have

been a man of large income and social habits, who would have had his house always full of company, paid her milliner's bills without grumbling, and not have bored her with too much sense, or sensibility. She would not have objected to one or two pretty children, decked out in tasteful costumes, and provided with a proper staff of nurses and governesses; but as to nursing, and tending, playing with, and teaching the little plagues, that, she declared, was a nuisance she never could submit to!

Equally strong was her dislike to keeping accounts, controlling servants, mending clothes, writing letters,—in fact, to all the tasks falling to the share of a woman whose position requires her to be a helpmate, as well as a joy and a pride. Nor, failing the higher attributes of counsellor and administratrix, did Arthur find in his wife a companion and trusty friend. If he were in any trouble or difficulty, it was not to her he could unbosom himself. “What do I care about your stupid barrack squabbles?” or, “Don’t be always talking to me about money?” was sure to be the discouraging reply. She had no sympathy for misfortune that did not touch herself; and far from seeking to share her

partner's anxieties, resented almost as an unkindness any effort to involve her therein.

Even on more cheerful topics there was little congeniality between them. The soft nonsense of courtship cannot be kept up for ever; and great as may be a gentleman's partiality for feminine prattle, as opposed to the political, theological, or agricultural jargon of his male associates, strong as may be his repugnance to a wife with a smattering of science, or "a mission" for colonising South Africa, we suspect that he will not sit down contentedly for life beside one who cannot enter into his favourite pursuits, and has nothing to entertain him with but trivial remarks upon her acquaintance, or prolix details of some petty housekeeping affair. If, too, he has known a woman of bright intelligence and cultivated mind, of high capacity yet modest pretensions, in whose society hours passed like minutes, and whom a little importunity might have persuaded to devote all these good gifts to his service,—if, with the right casket standing before him, he, like one of Portia's suitors, has deliberately chosen a wrong one, the contrast embitters his disappointment.

And this was Arthur Maynard's case. Being an amiable man, he did not ill-treat his insipid consort for proving less angelic than he had been pleased to imagine her, nor revenge upon her his own want of discrimination; but he groaned inwardly at the prospect of the long years they were probably destined to pass together, and wished—for an extension of the law of divorce!

“Why not try to mould your wife to your own standard of excellence?” was the sapient advice tendered him by an elderly friend, to whom he confided his griefs. “At twenty, the character cannot be so fixed as to defy amendment.”

Arthur, however, was not the person to accomplish such a task, if indeed it be achievable; he rather needed guiding and confirming himself than was qualified to perform those offices for another; and had no resource but in passive resignation. What would have rendered the attempt unpromising, even in able hands, was the fact that Eglantine's faults were chiefly of the negative order. Unsolid as water, as Hyacinth once described her, it was difficult to obtain any hold over her temperament. Her

husband's unbounded indulgence failed to touch her heart, because she really had no heart to be touched; she involved him in pecuniary embarrassments, simply because she could not be made to understand the value of money; and sometimes annoyed him by levity and childishness, proceeding rather from ignorance than disregard of propriety.

One point about her that was positive and strongly marked, was her dissatisfaction with her circumstances. As soon as the novelty wore off, she relapsed into discontent. The island afforded few distractions to a lover of pleasure; she disliked the black servants; could not endure the insects; and, finally, taking advantage of the alteration in her health, insisted on returning to England. Arthur protested with all his eloquence: he could not expect to obtain leave to accompany her, nor were his finances so flourishing as to render the expense a matter of unconcern: to allow her to undertake the voyage alone, in her delicate state, revolted his tenderness, and he was dismayed at the interposition of an additional risk between him and the realisation of his most cherished hope. Remonstrance, however, was of no avail. Eglantine

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wept, and worried, predicted all manner of calamities, and made herself so wretched and nervous, that there appeared at last more danger in opposing her wishes than in yielding to them. She who shrank from every kind of exertion, and could not cross the road without an escort, professed herself ready to brave unprotected the fatigues and perils of a transatlantic passage! Consent was ultimately extorted, her passage taken in the next steamer; and with sad misgivings on one side, and ill-disguised exultation on the other, the young couple parted.

It was to his mother's care Arthur had consigned his wife, earnestly bespeaking for her the utmost kindness and attention. He had always been cautious of expressing disapproval in his letters home, and now took special pains to secure her a cordial reception. "I look forward," wrote he, "to the birth of our child to supply whatever has yet been wanting to our felicity. My beloved Eglantine enjoyed so few domestic advantages, that her mental education has, in fact, to be begun. I do not expect, I am not sure that I wish her to become a pattern housewife; but with another life depending upon her, she can hardly fail to take a more enlarged

view of her position, and one duty fulfilled will quicken her perception of the rest. If, without schooling her too openly, you could manage to give her a few hints about good management, and so forth, you would be doing us a great service, for I am nearly as ignorant of these matters as she is, and between us both, we shall come to grief one of these days."

This well-meant arrangement did not suit the proposed pupil at all. In less than a week, she was tired to death of the Maynards' hum-drum existence, and only sought a plausible excuse for leaving them. She found one in the critical state of her sister-in-law, who was daily expecting her confinement; and feigning great unwillingness to deprive Mrs. Bathurst of her mother's undivided attentions at such a period, she suggested the expediency of transferring herself to her own parent's roof. The plan was too reasonable to be opposed; it was natural that Eglantine should wish to see her mother; and although Mrs. Maynard had some scruples about relinquishing the charge confided to her, it was a relief not to have two invalids on her hands at once; for Eglantine, though in excellent condition, and with some time yet before her,



already gave as much trouble as Laura, who was very far from well. The former was accordingly allowed to take her departure, with the understanding that she was to return as soon after the latter's convalescence as should be convenient to herself. The Admiral saw her safely to London, where it was arranged that she should remain a few days with the Aguilars, who came up on purpose to meet her.

Instead, however, of accompanying them back to Ribbisham, *en route* to her mother's present abode, she announced her intention of going to Harrowgate with a lady whose acquaintance she had made on board the packet, and writing to Mrs. Desart to join her there. To all Rose's objections, she replied, 1st (petulantly), that she did not come home from Bermuda to bury herself in a Lincolnshire village; 2nd (considerately), that Mr. Desart might not relish such an invasion of his premises; 3rd (providently), that in case of need, better medical attendance could be had in a place of public resort than in a remote corner of the country; 4th (and finally), that she was a married woman, and would not be dictated to!

Mrs. Aguilar's hostility to the measure was in

no degree lessened by the aspect of Eglantine's new friend, a tall woman, with bold black eyes, whose skill in the science of dress rendered it a matter of uncertainty where nature ended and art began. The rich silks she usually wore were made so ample in the skirts, so loose about the body, that her figure was left to the imagination; the multifarious plaits of hair were twisted too carelessly round her well-shaped head, to suggest a doubt of their inseparable connection with it. That she had quitted the West Indies under a cloud, neither sister was of course aware; but Rose did not like her looks, and thought her by no means a desirable companion for a giddy young creature like Eglantine.

That self-reliant matron, however, was bent on asserting her independence, and saw with satisfaction instead of alarm that, in twenty-four hours after their arrival, she and Mrs. Daymond had attracted round them all the idle men at Harrowgate. There was among them a sufficient sprinkling of fashionable names to satisfy her not over-fastidious requirements; and delighted to find herself again in what she considered her element, she threw herself into the

prevailing game of flirtation, with all the zest of an English school girl, all the abandon of a French woman of the world; Mrs. Daymond's example encouraging her to push things much farther than she would have ventured to go on her own responsibility.

Mr. Dacre happened to be at Harrowgate at the time, and immediately attached himself to their party. Nothing amused him more than to decoy silly women into scrapes, and perceiving that one was too thoughtless to discover his drift, while the other was too unscrupulous to resent it, he fooled them both to the top of their bent. With his success in the latter quarter we are not concerned; as to Eglantine, of whom he had taken little notice in her maidenhood, he easily persuaded her that he was a victim to her maturer charms, and induced her to permit a show of devotion, which from a man of his character, to a woman in her position, could not fail to have a damaging effect.

Some rumour of these proceedings reaching Mrs. Maynard's ears, she wrote, urging her daughter-in-law's immediate return, as Laura was now out of danger, and the happy mother of a fine little girl. But Eglantine was in no hurry

to exchange her present *bruyant* mode of life, for the dull decorum of the Maynard household. Meanwhile the whispers derogatory to her reputation began to take a more definite shape, and Mrs. Maynard, seriously alarmed for her son's honour, was preparing to set off for Harrowgate, and reclaim the fugitive, when news came that Eglantine, having imprudently over-fatigued herself at a pic-nic, had been taken suddenly ill; and that Mrs. Desart, hastily summoned from Lincolnshire, had arrived just in time to assist at the birth of an infant, which survived but a few hours.

Sad tidings these for the husband and expectant father, who had built so many hopes upon that brief existence!

"I fear you will blame me," wrote Mrs. Maynard, after communicating the melancholy intelligence, "for not having taken better precautions against such a misfortune; but I never imagined for a moment that Eglantine was going anywhere but to her mother's, whose company at such a period it was not surprising she should prefer to mine. Not a hint did she drop of this Harrowgate scheme before quitting our house; or I

should have protested most strongly against her departure. How Mrs. Desart could have allowed her to go on as she did, passes my comprehension ; but these Leycesters all seem flighty, unprincipled people. Laura, I am afraid will long rue her intimacy with that fascinating Mr. Leycester, whose free manners Bathurst has neither forgotten nor forgiven. We hope the child will prove an effectual peacemaker."

Mrs. Maynard touched very lightly upon her daughter-in law's deviations from "propriety," being reluctant to alarm Arthur about dangers which he was too far distant to avert. But ill reports reached him through other channels. In the first place he was dissatisfied with Eglantine's letters, which were short, cold, and vapid, containing nothing that a fond husband most cared to know. Secondly, he had casually learnt some particulars respecting Mrs. Daymond, which made him strongly disapprove the friendship his wife had struck up with her ; and lastly a newcomer from England, who had been at Harrogate, mentioned, as the latest piece of scandal, the flirtation between Mr. Dacre and a Mrs. Arthur Maynard.

The answers Arthur received to his enquiries

concerning the gentleman were not re-assuring.  
“Was he a young man?”

“Oh no; he was growing grey in wickedness, and a greater reprobate did not exist; for he had no heart, and would ruin a woman quite coolly, for the mere sake of excitement.”

And this was the person for whom Eglantine had already compromised her reputation, and was ready, perhaps, to make a still more costly sacrifice! To be forsaken for such a rival, was mortifying; to be deceived by one who had proved herself almost a child in intellect, and whose innocence was her chief remaining title to his esteem; to discover that that once adored creature did not even possess the poor merit of fidelity, and that he should have a hard task to guard what was so little worth the keeping—to remember that he was pinching himself in every way to supply her with the means of betraying him; and that not only were his first bright visions quenched, but that the sort of negative comfort to which he had been reduced to aspire, might be exchanged for obloquy and endless trouble—this was an accumulation of miseries, before which the loss of his infant offspring faded into insignificance.

He must hasten to Europe and strive to avert the impending disaster, even if he resigned his commission; and had actually sent in a petition for leave on "urgent private affairs," when another letter arrived which altered all his views. In her impatience to resume the giddy career her *accouchement* had interrupted, Eglantine had disregarded all advice, and made her appearance in public before her recovery was fairly completed, caught a violent cold, which ended in a fever, and died after a few days' illness, incapable alike of penitence and of faith.

## CHAPTER IX.

"Mercy on's, a barne; a very pretty barne! . . . . I'll take it up for pity."

WINTER'S TALE.

"I have surely seen him:  
His favour is familiar to me."

CYMBELINE.

THE news of Eglantine's decease revived an almost extinct hope in Anna Leycester's breast. The death of one of its members often brings together a scattered family, softens old animosities, and re-unites long-severed interests. If Hyacinth were within hearing of the event, he would surely attend his sister's funeral, or testify in some way his concern in the common affliction. He was her only male relative, and in her husband's absence, the most proper person to take the direction of her affairs. He did not, however, appear at Harrowgate, nor had any of those assembled there received the slightest intimation of his existence. The sole fact elicited,



served but to deepen the obscurity which enshrouded his fate. Lord and Lady Etheredge, who were very irregular correspondents, wrote on this occasion from Smyrna, and sent messages to him, making it evident he was not in their company, as had been thought possible; and on the question being put to them, they replied that in the course of their travels they had never once come across him, and did not know that he had quitted England.

Thus the last glimmer of light was quenched; and Mrs. Leycester was left without a single speck to guide her to any rational conjecture concerning him. There were moments when she became a prey to despondency, and brooded over tales of sudden disappearance, the result of strange accident or crafty malice, till she grew sick with horror at the phantoms her own imagination evoked. At calmer intervals, and in broad daylight, she was able, it is true, to reflect that in these days of electric telegraphs and detective police, men are not easily kidnapped, nor victims, whether of crime or fatality, long concealed from human eye: still such things might be; the deep hides many a secret, and, if not in this country, yet in other less orderly, or more thinly-peopled lands

many a forest dell and mountain glen, many an untrodden desert and haunt of violent men, may hold relics the story of which will never be told, till the day when earth and sea shall give up their dead.

With such gloomy musings did Mrs. Leycester often scare sleep from her pillow. She led a very retired life at Hildhurst. Her spirits were not attuned to lively or even grave conversation, and she was too conscious of the awkwardness of her position, to adventure herself in general society. She would willingly have kept her niece with her, but Mrs. Wentworth fell ill, and Mary was wanted at home. After her departure Anna's sole distraction consisted in kindly intercourse with her poor neighbours. Her own troubles did not render her less ready to lend a pitying ear to theirs; and in active benevolence alone, could she find any balm for the unclosed wound of her heart.

In her lonely walks about Hildhurst, she frequently met a young girl, whose family she knew, carrying an infant. Like most married women to whom offspring have been denied, Anna had a yearning towards all babies; and there was something about this one, that commended it especially to her sympathies. It was a puny

little creature when first she saw it; the girl said it had but newly come into her mother's charge, and pined after its former attendant.

"It is not yours, then," said Mrs. Leycester, examining the child with fresh curiosity.

"Oh dear, no, Ma'm," replied Ellen, blushing and bridling; "it don't belong to us nohow. It's a nurse-child as came to lodge at mother's with a furrin young woman; but after she had been there a while, she took up with a furriner that played in the band at Maidstone, and went off with him, leaving the poor innocent on mother's hands."

"And she has kept it since?"

"Why, yes, Ma'm; she couldn't make up her mind to throw it on the parish, so we have nursed it among us; but what to do with it when it gets bigger, mother doesn't know. She has enough of her own to feed."

"Indeed she has," said Mrs. Leycester; "I must speak to her, and consider what can be done to relieve her of such a burden."

Mrs. Simpson had little to add to her daughter's statement concerning the child. Whether it belonged to the stranger, or was entrusted to her to nurse, was uncertain, for she spoke very

indifferent English, and was not communicative; but the villagers rather opined that she was not its mother. "Leastways," said they, "she didn't behave as sich." There did not appear to have been any lack of money, though she left not a sixpence behind her, nor the slightest clue by which her employers, if she had any, could be traced. Whence she came,—why she fixed upon Hildhurst as her abode,—whither she had gone, whether she would return,—were questions to which no answer could be given. Mrs. Leicester arranged to pay a weekly sum for its maintenance, so that Mrs. Simpson should be no loser by her motherly charity. Under her fostering care the little one thrived apace, and showed early signs both of comeliness and intelligence.

But it was neither its bloom nor its intellectual promise that chiefly arrested Anna's attention; nor did the interest we naturally take in a *protégé* entirely account for the solicitude she manifested. A vague resemblance between the child's face and one with which she was familiar, had struck her almost at first sight, though the idea was dismissed as fanciful. As he grew older, however, the shadowy likeness stood out in

stronger relief; not only his features, the fair curly hair, and sapphire-blue eyes, but his pout, his smile, his little gestures recalled an image indelibly engraved on Anna's memory. For some time she only said, "It is very extraordinary!" for the countenance so reflected was of no common cast; but one day when the boy was brought up to her at the Lodge, and she was dandling him in her arms in the room which contained her husband's portrait, the conviction flashed upon her that the painted canvass and the living picture were copies of one original. As if to confirm the evidence, the child stretched his arms towards the handsome face that seemed to smile down upon him, and uttering his baby-formula, which sounded as much like "Pa, pa," as like anything else, turned to Anna with the exact curve of lip and brow which the artist was thought to have seized so happily.

This could be no accidental coincidence. Coupling the marked likeness with the mystery attaching to his parentage, and the circumstance of his being quartered in the immediate neighbourhood, there seemed scarcely a doubt that the pretty little creature hanging round her neck was the progeny of Hyacinth Leycester.

But by what mother? When begotten? The foreign nurse appeared to indicate that he was born abroad; of some person, perhaps, who had accompanied Mr. Leycester in his flight; yet the child's age forbade this assumption: he must have seen the light before the rupture took place. It was while Hyacinth was living under the same roof with his wife, enjoying her unbounded affection, occasionally repaying it in kind, that he had carried his hollow vows elsewhere, and lavished upon some other woman the priceless treasure of his love!

The thought smote Anna with jealous anguish; she hastily dismissed the boy, and avoided the sight of him for several days. Entire possession of Hyacinth's heart, was a height of bliss his wife had never ventured to anticipate; she had even had grave cause to suspect him of undue preference for others; yet this *proof* of his infidelity affected her painfully, as with a new grief. She could not bear to contemplate the living pledge of a love that should have been hers, and shut herself up in bitterness of soul.

Then came a reaction; she met the unconscious tell-tale again, and was unable to resist

his innocent blandishments. He cried to go to her, and nestled in her bosom as though his proper home were there. The touch of those small fingers stirred strange sensations in Anna's breast. The child's affection might, perhaps, make amends for the father's. *His* child! what a title was that to her protection, her tenderest care! If she treasured every trifle that had belonged to him, and held sacred every place associated with his memory, how much more precious was this little being, a portion of himself, with his blood in its veins, his image stamped upon every feature. No matter who else was concerned in bringing it into the world, it was *his*; that was sufficient reason for her doting upon it, and resolving to devote to its service the time, the fortune, the store of affection, which all lay idle on her hands.

The Simpsons saw nothing extraordinary in her proposal to adopt their nursling; she was well known to be as kind as she was rich, and "a house without children must be awful lonesome," the village matrons thought. A trusty person was engaged to look after the boy, and an apartment at the Lodge prepared for their reception.

The next thing to be provided for him was a name. Hitherto he had passed under the common designation of "baby," but he was getting old enough to require a more distinctive appellation. None had been assigned him by his foreign nurse; none, at least, that the people about him could recollect. It was not even possible to ascertain whether he had ever been baptized. After consulting the clergyman of the parish, Mrs. Leycester decided to have the ceremony performed now, at all events, and presenting herself as one of the sponsors, in conjunction with the Vicar and Farmer Simpson, she named him "Jasmine Leycester." She could not call him "Hyacinth," without proclaiming her reason for the choice; and besides, there could be but one Hyacinth in the world for her.

"What will you do for a surname for this young Christian?" asked his reverend godfather, when the rite was completed.

"Time enough for that," replied his godmother. "The names he has will suffice for some years to come. I cannot let him use my husband's without his permission; but before the child wants a patronymic, his own may be discovered; and if not, we must invent one for



him. I do not feel disposed to borrow his foster mother's; Simpson is hardly euphonious enough for my adopted son; but Hildhurst, for instance, would not sound ill."

"On the contrary," said the Vicar smiling; "it has a territorial signification, which is highly aristocratic, and would have the advantage of marking his connexion with this place, without leading to any confusion, or trenching upon any family rights. 'Jasmine Leycester Hildhurst,' is a name I shall be very happy to teach him to write bye and bye."

"Meanwhile, we will not forestall matters," said Mrs. Leycester, smiling also. "He may remain simply 'Master Jasmine,' as long as he wears petticoats."

Thenceforth the child became her chief occupation and solace. She comforted him in trouble, soothed him when fractious, sacrificed all her own pursuits to his amusement, guided his uncertain footsteps, encouraged his first attempts at articulate speech; and found her reward in his marked preference, his trustful affection.

Each day developed some fresh point of resemblance, both in person and disposition, to the

parent for whose sake mainly Anna so cherished him. The hair set on his little head, just as on that precious one that had lain on her breast; the fickle temperament, passing rapidly from one mood to its opposite; the taste for ornament, and love of animals; the imperious demands upon her attention, made with a half consciousness of the pleasure it gave her to comply, which took them out of the region of pure selfishness; the mingled indolence and acuteness, good feeling and perversity, which formed the salient features of Hyacinth's character, were all repeated on a small scale. To watch Jasmine, was like reading an abridgement of a celebrated work, preserving the pith and substance, though wanting the picturesque details, the power, the incommunicable charm of the original.

So interested and absorbed was Anna in this study, that could she have been assured of her husband's welfare, she might almost have become reconciled to his absence; but anxiety on his account kept alive her regrets; and, had she been so inclined, the son would not let her forget the father.

## CHAPTER X.

Chill and dun  
Falls on the moor the brief November day.

KEBLE.

Who ever says a word in praise of November? Yet it is a month of no small importance in the sporting calendar, and brings a renewal of life and energy to a vast proportion of the male sex in these realms, numbers of whom look upon the pursuit of the fox as the main object of man's existence. This is their talk by day, their dream by night; on this pastime they concentrate an amount of forethought, endurance, expenditure, and daring, that would set up two or three foreign armies; and if (during a hard frost) their ideas ever wander from this earth, it is to imagine a Paradise where foxes are plentiful, hedges abound, where the scent always lies, and no horseman crosses another in his path. The most inveterate may perhaps be ungallant enough to

add—where no females exist, to divide their attention in the field with the nobler animals, and oblige them to keep awake after dinner!

While the commencement of the hunting season awakens the keenest interest in those who merely look to it for amusement, it is no less welcome to hundreds who gain a livelihood by supplying the *materiel* of the sport. There is much enquiry then for grooms, “who understand the management of hunters;” horse-dealers and veterinary surgeons, blacksmiths, and sadlers, farmers, tailors, bootmakers, down to manufacturers of scarlet cloth and dressers of leather, all profit by the increased demand for their wares and services.

Great activity was visible this November in the extensive establishment of J. Riddell, horse-dealer and trainer, in one of the best hunting districts, where “a large assortment was continually on view,” of every description of steed, from the well-bred hunter, up to any number of stone, to the useful animal, “quiet to ride and drive, and has carried a lady.” A swarm of hostlers pervaded the spacious premises, currying, rubbing down, feeding, and otherwise attending upon their four-footed charges, while not a

few sunned themselves comfortably in the yard, exchanging stable remarks and jocularities. A general touching of caps proclaimed the master's approach.

"Where's Ryder?" called he, glancing over the group; "that fellow is—"

"Here," responded a voice.

Turning in the direction of which, Mr. Riddell perceived a young man, who, half reclined upon some trusses of hay, watching the gambols of an infantine puppy, tranquilly awaited his pleasure. He was dressed groom fashion, "with a difference" which it would not be easy to define, and had a bunch of autumn violets in his buttonhole.

"Oh, Ryder, I want you to drive the iron-greys over to Dalston Court; I expect we shall find a purchaser there after all," said Mr. Riddell.

"When?" said the Spartan on the hay.

"As soon as you can," was the reply; "I promised Sir Charles that they should be sent this morning for him to have another look at."

The recumbent individual raised himself on his elbow, and looked around him.

"Richard!" he shouted, "put the iron-greys

into the break, and bring it round directly, will you?"

At that moment Mrs. Riddell, a homely matron advanced in years, emerged from the dwelling-house. Richard passed her without notice, to execute his errand; Ryder lifted his hat. Mr. Riddell remarked the courtesy and frowned.

"I wish," he began, shifting his position uneasily; "I wish, Ryder, you would show me more respect; you—"

"Respect!" cried the other, looking up sharply; "why respect? You agreed to pay me a certain sum of money, in consideration whereof I undertook to ride, drive, break in, and train, any and every horse submitted to me for the purpose; in short, to risk my neck as often as required. There was nothing said about respect one way or the other."

"As your employer, I am entitled to—"

"An exact fulfilment of the duties I engaged to perform. If you are dissatisfied with our contract, it is easily dissolved."

"Oh! I don't find no fault with the bargain," said Riddell in a mollified tone; "only with your devil-may-care sort of ways. You can be civil enough to my old woman."

"I honor her *sex*," replied his assistant, rising leisurely from his couch, and putting the puppy into his pocket, as the iron-greys, duly harnessed, were led into the yard. Without further parley he was moving away, when Riddell cried :

"Stop a bit; I hav'n't told you the terms of the sale."

"Tell your man," was the laconic answer; "I can't chaffer about prices."

"Why, one would fancy you was a gentleman, by the hairs you give yourself," remarked the "employer," with cutting irony.

"Did you ever doubt it?" enquired the employed, facing round with a look of quiet surprise, which disconcerted the worthy stable-keeper more than the loudest asseverations of dignity.

He muttered some uncomplimentary remarks touching "prigs who were above their business;" but when he noted the cool confidence with which the young man assumed the command of his impatient steeds, the skill with which he piloted the skittish mare round an awkward turning, Mr. Riddell felt that his "uppish" assistant was worth his salt; and, more prudent than

Gessler, privately resolved to forego the cap-controversy.

It would be insulting the reader's sagacity to doubt his immediate recognition of a familiar countenance, under the disguise of the *soi-disant* Ryder. Without presuming, however, as some unconscientious writers do, to impose upon him the task of inventing the story he is invited to peruse, dismissing every intricate point with an easy phrase or so, in this style: "It is needless to trace step by step the downward career which led, &c., &c.;" or, "The reader's imagination will readily supply the gap which, &c., &c.;" we will endeavour to explain how Mr. Hyacinth Leycester came to hold such a situation; for which purpose we must return to the period when he quitted Ribbisham Parsonage for his mother's empty house in Brook Street.

The gloom and desolation of the untenanted chambers just suited his desponding frame of mind; he had a moody satisfaction in being uncomfortable, and loathed the ill-cooked meals served by a dingy charwoman, less than the dainty preparations of his most epicurean club. He shunned all places of public resort, and never stirred out till after dusk, or before the



world—his world—was awake. As luck would have it, Dacre discovered his retreat, and forced an entrance.

"*Salut, mon prince,*" cried he, glancing curiously round the cheerless apartment. "What's the move now? Are you doing penance, or hiding from duns? expiating your sins of carnal indulgence, or avoiding the vulgar necessity of paying for the same? By Jove! you must have a most tender conscience, or inexorable creditors, to shut you up in a dreary den like this, in the very prime of the London season!"

"I certainly sought privacy in selecting my present abode," replied Leycester. "But my pecuniary difficulties are rather prospective than actual. I owe no man a shilling at present, but how to get on when the funds now in hand are exhausted, is a mystery you can perhaps help me to solve."

"Borrow," suggested Dacre, with the promptitude of experience. "It is the readiest way of supplying a temporary deficiency, and comes much easier than you would fancy."

"Borrow of whom?" asked Hyacinth, half-sarcastically. "Have *you* a spare hundred or

so at the service of a friend in distress, or is it to the tender mercies of an usurer you would consign me?"

"You are obtuse, *mon cher*. A man of your figure need never be at a loss for assistance. Oh! you need not blush so indignantly, nor flash disdain at me from those all-conquering eyes. I do not expect you to sell your kisses for so much hard cash, though it is a kind of barter with which, methinks, you are not wholly unfamiliar; there are various other means of accommodation, by which the fair creatures can display their gratitude. Your old ally, the Ambassadress, for instance; has not she influence enough to obtain you some neat little foreign post?"

Hyacinth did not answer; the taunt about his mercenary marriage had closed his mouth, and prevented the protest he was ready to utter against the vile traffic recommended to him. A man who had openly married for money, had no right, he thought, to pique himself on the loftiness of his sentiments. With an inconsistency common among the followers of the world's standard of morality, he had been deeply shocked at the supposition that he could be bribed to bestow a passing embrace; yet where, asked his

startled conscience, was the great difference, except that the bargain concluded under the sanction of law and religion, ratified by the most solemn vows, was perhaps the more odious transaction of the two! Never had he sunk so low in his own esteem as when this truth, cleared from the disguises and palliations society hangs round it, flashed upon his view.

Dacre expatiated in vain upon the profits of infamy; the younger voluptuary, whose sins hitherto had been more those of a soft nature than a vicious mind, sat absorbed in his own reflections, scarcely hearing the tempter's voice, till Dacre wound up by saying:

"If, as I infer from your grave face, you are too virtuous for such expedients, why, in the name of common-sense, don't you go back to your wife; tell her you can't live without her, and promise to be a good boy for the future?"

"Why? Because I cannot stoop to commit a meanness; at least until I have no option but between that and a crime."

"You take things so tragically, my dear fellow! Depend upon it, the senior partner of your firm is wretched without you. I never knew a woman break her chain, but she was uneasy

till she had patched it up anew. Come and dine with me at the Coventry; and 'be a butterfly' again. You have got hipped living here alone in this chrysalis (not to say *grub*) state."

Hyacinth, however, declined the invitation; and begged Dacre not to mention having seen him, as he had no mind to be bored with advice, consolation, or enquiry.

The fact of his presence in town in straitened circumstances, must have oozed out in some way; for a day or two after this visit, he received the following billet:

"DEAR CINTHY,

"I hear you are short of tin. I have lots. Come and share it while it lasts. We will go anywhere you like.

"GRACE."

"So, this is the opinion generally entertained of me!" muttered Hyacinth, crushing the paper in his hand. "I was not surprised at Dacre's mistake; he judges me by himself, and it is well known he is not too fastidious to accept substantial favors from those who have been kind to him in other ways; but why this woman should

imagine me base enough to live upon the price of —bah! *fille de marbre*, you would do the same, unless all history belie you. Yet you meant well, and yours is, after all, the first hand stretched out to me in my supposed need."

Under which softened impression, he wrote in reply:

"BEST OF THE BAD,

"Having sold myself once for all, I am not for hire. Nevertheless, I thank you.

"H. L."

Profoundly disgusted with himself and all mankind, his wife's obstinate silence, his mother's selfishness, his sister's apathy, Dacre's venial counsels, and Grace More's humiliating generosity, Leycester's first object was to escape from scenes and people so uncongenial with his present humour. Hastily concluding what little business he had, he dismissed his servant (after a final struggle on Anderson's part), and fled to the opposite shores of the Channel, less with any specific idea of advantage in so doing, than because it furnished a plausible answer to all enquiries after him.

Now Hyacinth had never been abroad till after his marriage, when he journeyed *en prince*, putting up at first-rate hotels, and having a retinue of servants and a wife versed in continental systems, to take all trouble off his hands. He was therefore ill-prepared for the petty annoyances which befall travellers of humble means; and as his spirits were at the lowest pitch of dejection, he was vexed and worried by many a trifle at which, in happier times, he would have smiled. Even in his own country, he was accustomed to devolve the care of his luggage upon some one else, and found it an oppressive task to calculate a bill in familiar shillings. Imagine him, then, roused from his dreamy abstraction to present passports, surrender keys, and satisfy foreign porters, in the stifling crush of a *douane*, about the size and aspect of a slightly magnified bathing-machine. The search, to be sure, was purely nominal; so much the more vexatious did it seem to be delayed and tormented for a mere form; especially when, on reaching Paris, the process was repeated, on the plea of ascertaining that his hat-box did not contain fresh meat!

His next trouble was in connexion with the fee system, happily abolished on English lines,

but still flourishing on the French, to a most aggravating extent. For carrying his effects from the omnibus to the platform, so much; for lifting them from the floor to the weighing machine, so much; for transporting them thence to the train, so much; and if the gratuity fell short of the anticipation, no London cabman could be more insolent. On emerging a second time from the purgatory of the examining room, Hyacinth, in his ignorance and confusion, offered his remaining small change to the porter who conveyed his property to a *fiacre*. With fury in his voice and gestures, the man rejected the inadequate recompense, and flinging it into the vehicle, stalked penniless away.

Stunned by this unexpected demonstration, our pacific hero surrendered himself to the most persevering touter, and was conducted to an hotel in a long dark street, with a narrow *façade* like the Princess's Theatre, and a rambling interior, defying every attempt to construct a mental ground-plan. The apartment in which he was finally installed, comprised a sitting-room, overlooking a small square court; a cupboard, with folding doors, within which a bed lay hid till wanted; and a *cabinet de toilette*, with a tiled

floor, not unlike a miniature scullery. Left here in company with his portmanteau, the English traveller's first collected idea was—hot water. A supply was brought him in a metal vessel resembling a milk jug, in which it had been boiled. Having with some difficulty made it understood that this modicum did not content his desires, it was intimated to him, that by giving due notice he could at a future time be furnished with a foot bath, consisting of a metal pan somewhat like a fish-kettle, which luxury figured as a separate item in the bill. Hyacinth's surprise was diminished, when he learnt the price of the wood required to heat that amount of water.

On proceeding to a temporary ablution with the means at command, he discovered no soap on the table which did duty as a washing-stand, and had to hunt up a piece from his carpet-bag, where Anderson's forethought had luckily packed some. After-enquiry produced the information that, in accordance with French notions of property, the soap would infallibly be carried away from every dressing-room, as the sugar is from every breakfast-table.

The outer man having been purified, and re-



reshed by a change of garments, the inner made its wants felt. Hyacinth rang for dinner. The *table d'hôte* he declined, for that day at least, and requested to be served in his apartment. So long an interval elapsed before any visible sign of preparation appeared, that he believed himself forgotten altogether, and pulled vigorously at the bell to remind the establishment of his existence. This brought up the waiter, laden with food and wine, and the usual appliances for consuming them, which he laid out with marvellous celerity, appeasing the hungry guest's wrath at the delay, by explaining that the public repast was going on at the same time; and that he, François-Marie, was the sole attendant upon five-and-thirty partakers thereof. After this disclosure, Hyacinth felt that he could not complain of scant ceremony; but when his slovenly meal was concluded, and François entered to remove the cloth, he perceived that the solitary waiter's functions were of a more comprehensive nature than he had yet conceived. The table was cleared, the room "tidied" (a process urgently needed, seeing it was strewn with half-unpacked effects for which there seemed no legitimate receptacle); the cupboard thrown

open, the bed turned down; and finally, to Hyacinth's unutterable dismay, the hand-basin he had used was emptied out of the window before his very eyes.

It was easy now to account for the foul stream which stagnated in the yard below, the reek from which, this hot summer evening, was so intolerable that Leycester hurried out of the house, passing an orange tree in full bloom upon the dirty stairs, and took refuge in a cigar. A star (and lamp) light walk along the boulevards restored his equanimity, and gave him courage to face once more the horrors of his abode, on regaining which, he was seized with a desire for a cup of tea—a feminine taste acquired by frequenting ladies' society, and willing to spare François-Marie's legs, he turned, after giving the order, into the deserted *salle à manger*, and there awaited the result. Such stuff was never before presented as a beverage to civilized man! tasteless, colourless, mere hot water disguised! Observing his blank look, the cup-bearer, who spoke a little English, and prided himself on his familiarity with insular customs, suggested a flavour of "rum," by way of an improvement.

Wearied and disgusted, Hyacinth retreated to

his apartment, and consigned himself, rather distrustfully, to repose; the bed, however, proved so excellent, that he slept deliciously, and was all the better for it next morning. With the experience he had gained, he was able to avoid some of his former mistakes; breakfasted on delicious chocolate, instead of wretched tea, dined well at a restaurateur's, got a bath, and went to the play, all for a fabulously small sum. On the second day, finding the exhalations from the court too much for his olfactory nerves to bear, he removed to clean, but excessively noisy, quarters near the Bank, where there was a pleasant little woman in the parlour to wish him *bon jour* when he hung up or took down his door key (a ceremony he regularly forgot for the first week), and a waiter of mild countenance, more affable of deportment than the stern François-Marie, who inspired Hyacinth with secret terror of being denounced as an "Aristo" to some sanguinary democratic association.

"How is it no chambermaids are employed?" he asked his landlady one day. "Surely making beds and dusting furniture is more a woman's work than a man's."

"Sir," answered the proprietress demurely,

“you cannot fail to perceive the grave inconvenience of deputing young females to wait upon gentlemen in their bedchambers.”

Leycester gave a dubious h—m, neither admitting nor denying the proposition, and replied by a counter interrogation: “Is there no inconvenience in obliging ladies to admit male attendants into their private apartments?”

Madame had never viewed the question in that light.

He passed the *garçon* on the stairs as he went up, and mentally admitted his own capacity for mischief to be greater than the worthy Jean’s; “but it is not fair to argue from an extreme case,” added he, conceitedly.

If it was not reserved for Hyacinth to make any startling discoveries in the well-trodden field of Paris, he saw a great deal that was new to him, becoming perhaps better acquainted with the great city, in his present lonely wanderings, than when he drove through the streets in his carriage, and mixed in its most polished circles. His impression of the government, institutions, national character, and other momentous points, (on which a few weeks’ residence gives every traveller a right to express a decided opinion)

were not profound enough to be worth recording. As to the public buildings and so forth, of course, in the Place de la Concorde, he blushed for Trafalgar Square; and thought the Arc de Triomphe, terminating a noble avenue, a far finer affair than the Marble Arch, leading to nothing; but he found no parallel in the French metropolis to the Parks and Gardens of London, and missed the squares and terraces of private houses, the stately range of Clubs—those real palaces of the English capital.

Among minor matters, he remarked the universal use of table-napkins, and absence of salt-spoons; the liberality in clean plates and parsimony in knives and forks; the abundance of mirrors, as an article of decoration, and the want of such a toilet-glass as a man could shave by with confidence; the perpetual rolling of drums, announcing the large military force at hand, and the impossibility of distinguishing officers from privates, either by their costume or their bearing. He wondered that of a nation so devoted to dress, the male half should make so bad a hand of it, and whether it was the figure, or the tailor, that was in fault. He was surprised at having to carry away whatever purchases he

made, and amazed to see little children of four or five years old brought to a six o'clock dinner at a *restaurant*, and fed upon a succession of highly-seasoned dishes, till sleep overcame them as they sat. He watched the building operations going on in all parts of Paris, and thought the men did not work very hard, and took more care of their safety than the corresponding class at home, the different stages of scaffolding being mounted by stairs with bannisters instead of a dizzy ladder. The decorum of the streets seemed in broad contrast with the license of the stage; the height of elegant luxury with the neglect of the commonest comforts of civilized life.

Finally, though no puritan, his Protestant notions were shocked at the open and national disregard of the Sabbath—mechanics plying their trades as usual; shops all open, or closed late in the afternoon only to enable their owners to join the gay crowds in the *Champs Elysées*, where singing was to be heard from dozens of little pavilions, and games of chance invited urchins to risk their *sous*. Compared with an English Sunday, even in London, where miles of blank

shutters necessarily give a mournful aspect to the deserted streets, the advantage certainly seemed to be on the side of obedience to the fourth commandment.

Sitting amid the dust and the din, Hyacinth fell to ruminating on the aspect this world would wear, if the restraints of which men are so impatient were removed altogether, and nothing stood between them and the free indulgence of their desires. The abolition of the day of rest had been tried, he remembered, by the fathers of the populace around him; and had not been found to answer well in any respect. How about other portions of the Decalogue? Without being much of a scholar, he was sufficiently familiar with the literature of Greece and Rome to form some faint notion of the monstrous depravity prevailing in ages when such religion as they acknowledged was pressed into the service of corruption, — when sensuality was an act of worship, cruelty a pastime, violence a title to respect, revenge a duty. Here, then, were people untrammelled by modern ideas of morality; and lifted above merely brute licence by a high expansion of intellect and the command of great material wealth. Did they

esteem themselves happy in their unbridled freedom, and attain that plenitude of good, whereof we imagine ourselves deprived by too rigid laws? Let their own pens testify. When every rhetorical artifice has been employed to gild debauchery, to palliate evil, and confound right with wrong, Solomon's conclusion is invariably reached, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit;" the bacchanal chorus merges into a wail of despair.

Not by all readers, perhaps, is this involuntary moral detected; but little used as the path is, Leycester arrived at it by the perception that the prohibitions imposed upon mankind are not arbitrary tests of submission (as a supreme power might unquestionably dictate), but salutary checks upon the perversity that would debase every instinct and faculty by abusing it. Abandoned wholly to our own devices, it seemed, we should be still more wretched than we contrive to make ourselves by rebelling against beneficent restrictions; for "the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, for our good always." A new view was thus presented of man's astounding folly in ruining his own soul, as well as of



the majestic forbearance, which "is provoked every day," and yet delays to strike. There was something to his mind more awful in a mercy so far beyond human parallel, than in all the terrors with which the Judgment-seat is armed. As his own sins glided one by one into view,—the levity, the utter forgetfulness of God, the wasted gifts, the stolen joys from which no sophistry could efface the Almighty's "mark of blame," the evil countenanced, if not actually partaken of, the guilt entailed through his means on other souls, which no repentance of his could wipe off, even if it availed to obtain pardon for himself; he ceased to complain that some trouble and sorrow had fallen to his lot, and felt abashed, as it were, at the mildness of the divine dealings with him.

In this state of feeling, he fastened eagerly, as newly awakened conscience is prone to do, upon the idea of expiation. He had led an easy, frivolous life, he would embrace a hard and self-denying one, inflicting on himself the discipline he deserved to suffer. At that moment he rejoiced at the prospect of difficulties thickening round him, and would not, if he could, have re-

placed himself in the position whence he had fallen. Had the voice which came to the prophet under the tent beside Nineveh, said also to him : "Dost thou well to persist in sullen solitude, tempting a fate I had not ordained, and shunning reparation for a wrong confessed?" he would have answered like Jonah, "I do well."

## CHAPTER XI.

"So is my horse, Octavius; . . .  
It is a creature that I teach to fight,  
To wind, to stop, to run directly on;  
His corporal motion govern'd by my spirit."  
JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE day of trial was at hand. Hyacinth's rapidly diminishing finances warned him that the privations he courted would soon become stern realities, and that, unless suicide by starvation formed part of his scheme, he must bestir himself to provide the means of future existence. To this end the first step was to regain his native shores, for no employment seemed open to him abroad. He left Paris, therefore, revolving all manner of projects, and fixing on none.

When he reached the coast, the sea was so rough that the mere sight of it made him uncomfortable; he resolved to wait a day or two, till the weather moderated. The walls of the town were placarded with announcements of a steeple-chase to be run shortly in the neighbourhood.

While taking a stroll into the country, he came upon some of the destined competitors going through their preparatory exercise, and with an Englishman's relish for equestrian sports, he watched their performances with interest. The ground offered no peculiar difficulties in his estimation, and there was one of the horses that looked capable of more than he was called upon to achieve, but either from bad training or bad riding, he took his leaps in the clumsiest way possible. An exclamation of impatience broke from Hyacinth, as the animal came scrambling over a ditch, which he ought to have cleared with scarcely an effort. His well-bred "Pish!" was translated into much broader Saxon by a burly individual near him, to whom, recognising a countryman, he was glad to vent his disapprobation.

"Did any one ever see a horse so ill-managed? He might have accomplished twice that distance without much prolonging his natural stride."

"So he might, sir, so he should; but these foreign chaps would ruin the best horse that ever was foaled. Look at that fellow's seat! Why, Wellington almost pulls him over his head whenever he stretches his neck."

"Are you concerned in the race?" asked Leycester, perceiving his companion's excitement.

"To be sure I am," was the reply, "very much concerned. That 'orse was purchased by me for a French gentleman, and would have fetched a long price if he showed well in front on Wednesday. I had engaged an English jockey to ride him, for you see, though a clever 'orse, he's rather heavy on hand, and wants spiriting up a bit; but as ill luck would have it my man falls sick, and I am obliged to put up with this French monkey."

"Who will assuredly be nowhere when the race comes off," said Hyacinth, with the calm sagacity of a looker-on.

"Just so," said the stranger, with an owner's warmth, "and the consequence will be that my Mounseer won't buy the 'orse, and I shall lose credit as well as cash, beside all the bets I have laid upon him."

"It is provoking," exclaimed Hyacinth, "I should not mind riding him myself, just for the honour of the country."

His new friend caught at the proposal. "You're a light weight," said he, scanning

him critically. "Have you had any practise in this kind of thing?"

"I will show you," answered Hyacinth, "if you like to trust me with Wellington. What a name, by the bye, to tempt a French customer!"

"He may call him Bonypart, when he's paid the purchase money," said the dealer, beckoning to Wellington's jockey, whom he desired to surrender his seat.

Leycester mounted, with a thrill of exultation at finding himself again in the saddle. Riding, in all its branches, was the one masculine accomplishment in which he excelled and delighted. As, at the glitter of weapons craftily displayed before him by Ulysses, the sex of Achilles betrayed itself under the female habiliments wherewith it was vainly sought to disguise him, so the innate manliness of the otherwise effeminate Leycester revealed itself the moment his foot touched the stirrup. No young Centaur seemed more completely a part of the animal he bestrode; for he did not merely establish a perfect command over the lower intelligence, but animated it, as it were, with his own will. You would have said, not that he guided the motions of his steed, nor that he accommodated himself to them, but that a com-

mon impulse swayed both. From breaking in an unbacked colt, to following the fleetest hounds across the stiffest country; from keeping a mettlesome through-bred quiet in the crowded precincts of London, to stimulating all his energies in a contest of speed, there was no style of horsemanship in which he was not an adept. His seat was the perfection of grace, his hand light but steady, his temper imperturbable, his nerve undaunted.

The sluggish Wellington acknowledged at once the superiority of the new *régime*. He reared his crest at the cheering voice, submitted graciously to the trial of his paces; and at the first pressure of the unarmed heel, went off like a shot, over a line selected by Hyacinth himself for the display of their joint capabilities, concluding by a leap that took away the deposed jockey's breath. Wellington's proprietor was in ecstasies, and an engagement was concluded on the spot, Leycester to receive half the stakes if he won, and all expenses paid.

"My name is Riddell," said the former, on completing the bargain; "John Riddell, of Ashby St. Martin, Leicestersheer. How shall I enter yours?"

"You may call me Ryder," replied Hyacinth, preferring that semi-descriptive title to his patronymic on an occasion like the present.

Glad at heart, Mr. Riddell then went his way to make the necessary arrangements; while his new ally walked off to inspect the course on which he was shortly to figure.

When, on the eventful day, he emerged upon it to take his preliminary canter, his appearance created no small sensation among the fairer portion of the spectators; bets were freely taken by them on his colour, and the lilac satin jacket was watched throughout with the keenest interest.

Eight horses started, one having upset himself over the rails before the business commenced. Wellington jumped off with the lead, took the first two leaps into and out of a lane in fine style, and stretched bravely across two meadows with a hedge between; at the turn he lost ground, and still more at the hurdles, from his very deliberate method of stepping over them; then came the brook, with a made fence on the near side of it, at which his backers trembled, fearing that the lilac satin would here tarnish its brightness. Horse and man, however, landed safely, though



the exploit was not as neatly performed as the male connoisseurs thought desirable. Next was a slope, with a bank surmounted by a low hedge dividing it from the adjacent fields. This proved a "teaser" to many. Le Fermier, a stout Norman horse, came down on his head, and was seen no more; Mousquetaire, a livelier animal, pitched off his jockey, and continued the game on his own account; Marengo bolted; Wellington cleared it at a mighty spring, but last of all. On the open ground beyond, his stride began to tell, and as the five remaining competitors came round the second time, Lilac again showed in front.

Now thoroughly roused by a judicious application of the spur, and catching the contagion of excitement, Wellington pressed forward at a swinging pace, increasing in velocity at every stride. As the group turned into the straight running, he looked very like winning indeed! But a lighter limbed horse was close at his quarters; and the hopes of his friends wavered at the prospect of the pair of hurdles and the brook that lay between them and victory. There was no hesitation now, however; he swept across the two first obstacles like a large wave; one more only was

left. The nimble Dumas dashed at the fence, and alighted safely on *terra firma*, though his hind legs touched the water's edge; Wellington gathered himself up and shot clean beyond it. The moment spent by the one in regaining his footing secured the other's triumph; the ladies who had backed Lilac, won their gloves by just half a length.

Mr. Riddell was enchanted; he sold Wellington at his own price, received a fresh order, and pocketed a good round sum besides the stakes. Hyacinth was not displeased with his share in the business; he enjoyed his success, and surveyed with some complacency the first money he had actually earned.

The incident furnished him, moreover, with a new idea. Suppose he were to teach riding! The natives in general stood sadly in want of instruction; never a lad among them could mount a donkey without infinite pains and unlimited ingenuity, and he had not yet seen one man fit to be trusted with a horse.

"How do they turn out such fine cavalry?" mused he in great perplexity. "Why has their Franconi the best circus in the world?"

Deep questions, which he was fain to lay by

unanswered, like a kindred one touching the extraordinary breeds of dogs that came under his notice. One was shown him with great pride by a votary of "*le sport*," which seemed a cross between a greyhound and a terrier; was used indifferently as a pointer or a setter, and answered to the name of Ovah. This, Leycester (having been told it was English) presumed to mean Over, until he discovered it was intended for Howard!

He consulted Mr. Riddell about his plan. The answer was not encouraging.

"You see, the French mostly don't want to ride," argued that authority, "and the few that do, don't want to be taught. Oh, I agree with you, they look like shop gents showing off on a Sunday; but, bless you, they call that *haute école*, which means tip-top style, I'm told; and wouldn't be persuaded to sit different for no consideration. What's the use of riding, they think, if it's made as easy as setting on a chair? So they stick their legs out straight, like open tongs, and hold the reins at arm's length, as tight as they can, keeping the wretched brute's nose in the air, and making him as uncomfortable as themselves. Do you suppose they'd take a master who made a natural use of his limbs,

and only pulled at the curb when he had a reason for it?"

Hyacinth did not relinquish his scheme, in spite of this unfavourable opinion upon it. He had seen, at English watering-places, professors of the equestrian art, cantering briskly about all day with little troops of damsels under their charge, and had fancied the task by no means an unpleasant one. This was the sort of business he now wished to establish. Riddell doubted whether it would pay, and advised his returning to England and sticking to the jockey's trade; but Hyacinth foresaw the impossibility of showing his face on any English racecourse of note, without being recognised by some of the frequenters, and resolved to try his luck first abroad. With Riddell's assistance, he invested part of his remaining capital in the hire of a few steady-looking quadrupeds, and announced his readiness to give lessons to all comers in the English style.

Pupils did not pour in very fast. Riding is not, as with us, an essential item in a young French gentleman's education; while the gentler sex, whom Hyacinth chiefly hoped to entice, were contented to admire him prancing about

the town, without any ambition to emulate his achievements. A Frenchwoman on horseback is a *rarior avis in terrâ* than a black swan; yet they call our nation of dashing huntresses and indefatigable *ecuyères*, lymphatic! The only applications Leycester received, proceeded from the British sojourners, some of whom would occasionally hire his horses for an afternoon's ride; while one or two confided their children to him for instruction and safe keeping.

Beyond this point he found it difficult to advance. He was not popular with his patrons, who thought his manners not sufficiently deferential; and prudent mammas were afraid to trust him with their grown daughters. Nor was their caution altogether superfluous. Without the remotest idea of conquest, and while entrenching himself in the strictest reserve and formality, Hyacinth the Irresistible could no more divest his demeanour towards women of a certain tenderness and gallantry, than he could conceal his rare personal advantages. An unconscious coquetry still pervaded every detail of his simplified toilet; and he carried with him that air of unmistakeable refinement, which is more seductive, perhaps, than beauty itself. In

a word, it was but natural that the charm which had thawed the *hauteur* of an ambassadress, enslaved a woman of feeling and principle like Anna Delamere, and touched even the callous heart of Grace More, should have a powerful effect upon the unsophisticated fair ones who sought pleasure or economy on the French coast.

Of the few female pupils he obtained, two became desperately enamoured of him during their first ride. One of these, a good-humoured little hoyden, not quite seventeen, made love to him openly in the most innocent manner imaginable. Though far from timid, she kept so close to his side that his left leg was in constant jeopardy; her reins and her habit were perpetually needing adjustment, and she courted a glance of his blue eyes with an assiduity that made it difficult to withhold the desired gratification. Hyacinth of course saw through her little devices; but as he had no desire to amuse himself at the young lady's expense, he affected a grave unconsciousness of her admiration, and resisted all attempts to establish a more familiar intercourse.

His other *inamorata*, who was much more advanced in years, was less demonstrative, betray-

ing her partiality chiefly by extreme impatience of every slight attention bestowed on her companion. If Miss Ackerman talked (as she generally did), Miss Greene drew herself up in silent stateliness; if Hyacinth seemed more careful of the giddy junior than of her, she was piqued, and complained of neglect; if he interfered with the management of her horse, as he did with Miss Ackerman's, she reminded him tartly, that "*she* was not a child." She practised upon him, in short, all the airs of a jealous mistress; and though she would have reckoned it the height of presumption for a person in his position to make advances to her, she resented his distant behaviour as angrily as if she had given him every encouragement to come forward.

Neither of them being in the least pretty, or fitted to distract his thoughts from more serious pre-occupations, Hyacinth soon grew heartily sick of them both, and was not sorry when Miss Greene, in a fit of spite, discovered it to be her duty to inform the parental Ackermans of the improper intimacy subsisting between their daughter and her riding-master; in consequence of which friendly caution, the damsel's further progress in love and horsemanship was brought

to a sudden stop. She wept, stormed, entreated, with equal ill-success; her very eagerness proving the prudence of the measure, as her mother was injudicious enough to observe: whereupon the girl, emboldened to mention a topic she would not otherwise have ventured to approach, broke out into a vehement declaration of her attachment to "Mr. Ryder," whom she pronounced immeasurably superior to the genteelst of her acquaintance, and vowed eternal fidelity to him, under whatever amount of persecution she might be called upon to endure for his sake!

Mamma was dreadfully shocked, and tried to convince her she was demeaning herself by taking a fancy to a man so much below her in rank (Mr. Ackerman was an employé in the Custom House); to which the young lady, as became her age, replied that true love levelled all such distinctions, and cited many illustrations of the maxim from history and fiction.

Papa shrugged his shoulders, spoke disparagingly of circulating libraries, and set off to abuse "that fellow" Ryder, for tampering with his daughter's affections. On his way, however, it occurred to him that it was inadvisable to expose



Miss Bessie's folly by making too much fuss about the matter; so he merely asked for his bill. Once in Hyacinth's presence, indeed, his desire to administer a reprimand perceptibly moderated; there was that about our young hero which had imposed on bolder spirits than Mr. Ackerman.

Hyacinth sat down to make out his account, flattering himself that one, at least, of his troubles was over; when a note was brought him from the fair origin of the same. Many a *billet doux* had it been his lot to peruse, amatory, reproachful, positive, and suggestive: but no such composition as this had ever before met his eye. It was at once sentimental and condescending, absurd enough to provoke merriment, yet almost touching in its utter *naïveté*. Assuming his participation in her emotions, the writer earnestly disclaimed all share in the ambitious views of her parents, and professed herself ready to brave all oppositions and encounter any hardships for and with the chosen of her heart.

"Hang the women!" exclaimed Hyacinth, smiting the table with his diminutive fist. "What on earth is to be done with the chit? If I take no notice of this precious epistle, she will be left under a delusion; if I enter into a clandes-

tine correspondence with her, I may compromise her respectability. What can I say, moreover? Nothing short of a proposal for an elopement will satisfy her. The proper plan, I suppose, would be to enlighten her father on the subject, but it seems unkind to betray her indiscretion, poor little thing! A hint of my being married would probably be the most efficacious method of working her cure."

The recollection cost him a pang; but he did not neglect to make use of it; and on presenting his bill for payment, contrived to drop an allusion to "his wife."

"What, are you married, then?" cried Mr. Ackerman eagerly.

"I have that honour," replied Hyacinth, steadily meeting the other's scrutinising gaze.

"I merely mean—that—you look so young," stammered Mr. Ackerman, by way of accounting for his interest in the matter; "and—I have never seen—"

"I am living just now *en garçon*," said Hyacinth, with an involuntary sigh. "My residence here is purely experimental."

"Ah! it is quite time Mrs. Ryder was here to look after you, I think," said Mr. Ackerman,

lucky moment. Riddell had just lost his head man, and was sadly in want of a trusty person to break in the unformed animals he purchased, and show off those he had for sale. He offered Leicester the vacant post; and Hyacinth, glad to be relieved of that care for the morrow which had begun to weigh very heavily on his spirits, accepted it at once. The salary was sufficient for his actual wants, the employment not uncongenial, and involving no publicity. He took a decent lodging, modified his dress so as not to look too manifestly above his station, and settled down to his new duties.

## CHAPTER XII.

"My life is cold, and dark, and dreary;  
It rains, and the wind is never weary;  
My thoughts still cling to the mouldering Past,  
But the hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,  
And the days are dark and dreary."

LONGFELLOW.

EVERYTHING did not go smoothly at first. Hyacinth was unaccustomed to subordination in any shape, and did not like being ordered about. One or two misunderstandings arose between him and Riddell as to the tone to be adopted towards each other; but he was too valuable to be lightly parted with, and generally carried the day. With the menial tribe around him, he succeeded better in establishing his place. He was habitually courteous to his inferiors, and the quiet dignity of his manner, contrasting with the imperious roughness of his master and theirs, subdued while it perplexed those about him. They called him "a tremendous swell," and carped in private at his lofty pretensions;

but the odour, as it were, of gentlemanhood affected them unconsciously, and in his presence few were bold enough to transgress the invisible line he drew. Without even the *prestige* of great physical strength, so imposing to rude natures, he seldom met with insolence or coarse familiarity; the sturdiest champion of the yard never ventured to molest him, fair and slight and fragile as he was.

The only menace of that kind he encountered was, as usual, *àpropos* of a woman. Meeting one of the grooms on a Sunday with his sweetheart, Leycester not only nodded to Richard, but raised his hat in compliment to his female companion. This trifling mark of homage, not customary among her own class, so charmed the girl that her lover grew jealous, and sought an opportunity to gratify his vindictive feelings. But it requires two parties to make a quarrel, and the unsuspecting Hyacinth set down to ill manners, conduct intended to provoke hostility. Wearied at length of indirect warfare, the enemy proceeded to the overt act of challenging him to "fight it out."

"*Encore!*" sighed Hyacinth, when he had been made to understand the point in dispute.

"My good fellow, I never spoke to the lady in my life, and should not know her if I met her in the street."

Richard declined to listen to "any palaver," and intimated his desire to resort to the *ultima ratio* of incensed lovers. Leycester's first impulse was to pass on with a "Tush! fight with your equals;" his second, to seat himself on a cask that stood handy, and enquire the time and manner of the proposed combat. It would not do, he reflected, to evade the liabilities of his position; the adversaries to whose level he had lowered himself must be met and vanquished on their own terms.

Richard thought there was no time like the present, and desired no weapons but those with which Nature had furnished him. Hyacinth doubled his fists, and surveyed them dubiously; they did not look very formidable, and had not been used aggressively from a remote period of childhood, if ever; but there was no help for it. He detected a lurking derision in the faces of two or three helpers who had scented the battle from afar, and felt that to draw back now was to invite a frequent repetition of such annoyances. Conquering, then, his horror of a

vulgar brawl, he gravely imitated his opponent's preliminary measures, maintaining as imperturbable a mien as if he had known himself to be a thorough master of the pugilistic art, and did not care in the least for a black eye. In his utter ignorance, perhaps, lay his strength. He was no match for Richard, either in muscle or skill; but was dangerous, as a woman sometimes is, because his irregular and rapid movements defied all attempts at calculation. Richard's science was useless against an antagonist whose tactics differed so widely from the established method; it was like some old routine general contending against the military inspirations of a genius like Napoleon. Hyacinth's arms were in such perpetual motion that the other could not see where to plant blows, any one of which would have told with disastrous effect; he did not at first attempt to do more than stand on the defensive, till catching the enemy somewhat off his guard, he ran suddenly at him with all his might, and laid him prostrate.

Leycester was probably as much surprised at his own success as any body else; but he turned away to resume his coat, as if it were quite an every-day occurrence, saying with a tinge of

irony in his voice, "I hope you are now satisfied that I entertain no designs of supplanting you in a certain person's favor?"

The muttered reply was unintelligible, but Hyacinth was plagued with no more ebullition of jealousy, and gained considerable credit for pluck—the highest of all popular qualities.

He held studiously aloof thenceforth from female intercourse, not daring even to cultivate acquaintance with his landlady, a hard-featured, shrewish widow of mature years, who was at first disposed to thaw a little towards her handsome lodger, and bitterly resented his backwardness in acknowledging her civilities. She had no patience, she declared, with such stuck-up people. Who was he, that he should hold his head so high? She wished it might be all right, but his shirts were marked with an L instead of an R, and were much too fine for the likes of him.

Ashby St. Martin was not a lively place. It was built in the shape of an F, with one long, steep street, and a smaller one branching from the top of it, besides a few lanes running off in various directions. The public edifices comprised a bank, certain to be shut when you par-



ticularly wanted to do business with it; a market, more for show than use, since the chief commerce was transacted in stalls down the High street; two very good inns, rising almost to the dignity of hotels, and a church in an out-of-the-way corner, where no one would have thought of looking for it. There was also a "great house," generally let for the season to some sporting gentleman of fortune; and a tiny row of genteel residences, with stucco fronts, and two square yards of garden between them.

The town supported a resident lawyer, besides one who ruined the county families, and lived in great state outside its boundaries; a veterinary surgeon; a wine merchant; and two members of the clerical profession, to wit, a drowsy old vicar, who sent the congregation to sleep on a Sunday morning, and a pert young curate, who gave them the fidgets in the afternoon. These feats performed, both deemed their duty pretty well completed for that week. A hurried visit might now and then be paid to a few sick folks, and the school claimed an occasional inspection; but very unsatisfactory were these rare meetings of pastors and flock. The vicar, indeed, was past the age for active labours; the curate was

but just essaying his functions, and could not command much attention from grey-headed back-sliders, though he spoke authoritatively enough.

Yet to this raw youth, and this superannuated veteran, were committed the eternal interests of some four thousand parishioners! O that the Spirit of God would move upon the face of the waters, that lie thus stagnant in too many by-ways of this clamorously-Christian country! Hundreds of souls are yearly drowned in these deep wells of ignorance and practical heathenism. Will any theory of church government, any ecclesiastical system, be accepted as an excuse for their perdition?

No wonder dissent flourishes in such ill-watched districts! The religion of the meeting house may not be of the most elevated kind, but it speaks a language which the hearers understand, and comes living and warm to their hearts from the preacher's lips; not drawled out, or slurred over, like a schoolboy's task. While the carefully-educated clergyman often thinks it enough to arrange a few dry sentences in proper order, with the least possible expenditure of thought and study, the uncultivated minister

steps in with his fervid zeal and partial views, and lures the sheep to his sectarian fold.

Our friend Hyacinth, like most of his class, adhered to "the Church," simply because it was gentlemanlike, and held "chapel-people" in much the same esteem as frequenters of suburban theatres—a *bourgeois* audience neutralizing any amount of merit in the pulpit or on the stage. It may be set down to his credit that, in his giddiest days, small as was the profit he derived from attending divine service; he always conducted himself, while there, with strict propriety. Indeed, he had often been quizzed by Dacre and others for his reverential demeanour.

"So you may call it a farce to go to Court," he would reply; "but no gentleman, having entered the Royal presence, would behave himself indecorously."

"Well, but just tell us what good you ever get by your pious observances?" would be the next remark.

"Oh! that I can't say," was Leycester's usual rejoinder; "they ought to be very beneficial, for I'm sure they are very tiresome."

At this time, however, he was in the mood to offer a more acceptable kind of worship, had

there been anyone to guide him aright. His conscience had been awakened; his repentance was genuine, as far as it went; he had a sincere desire to know more and to do better; but beyond this he had not advanced. The Gospel was still a sealed book to him; an historical fact, not a message of reconciliation. The ground was broken up and ready for the seed, but the negligent sower scattered chaff instead of wheat, and did but trample down the soil. The half-converted penitent grew weary of a service from which he derived neither instruction nor consolation; and came to regard his spiritual concerns in the same desponding light as his worldly prospects.

These were discouraging enough. He had closed readily with Riddell's proposal; but once provided with daily bread, the buoyant spirits which had hitherto supported him began to flag. Was this, he asked himself, the existence he was destined henceforth to lead, bound to a servitude only not menial because he steadily refused to let it be made so, and placed by his utmost exertions but just above the reach of present want? There was no chance of laying by anything out of his savings. The few shillings

left after defraying necessary expenses were usually spent upon the luxury he missed beyond all others—a cigar. Without an occasional sedative of that kind, his wretchedness would have become too great to be borne. Most men in his circumstances would have taken to drinking; but Hyacinth was fortunately too refined for that, or any of the coarser expedients by which it is sought to deaden remembrance, or drive away care.

When he could not afford to smoke, his sole resource was to stupify himself by extreme fatigue. He liked to go home so tired that he was fit for nothing but to fling himself on his bed and sleep. His occupation offered great facilities in this respect, when the hunting season commenced. It was part of his duty to take young horses out to learn their business, as well as to exhibit those that were awaiting a purchaser; and as there were four packs of hounds within reach, scarcely a day passed that he was not galloping over the country for seven or eight hours at a stretch.

He soon acquired the reputation of being the boldest rider, and the most unsociable churl, in all Leicestershire. Finding it difficult to main-

tain the bearing expected of one in his position, he took refuge in a general surliness of demeanor, saluted no man by the way, and, except as a matter of business, rarely opened his lips. Some imaginative person went so far as to hint that the silent horseman was an automaton, like the celebrated chess-player which puzzled half Europe; and certainly the calm, passionless manner in which he pursued the most exciting of pastimes, as well as the marvellous tenacity with which he adhered to the saddle, gave some colour to the fiction.

It was not, in fact, for pleasure that he now followed the chase: he would quit the field during the best part of the run, if he thought his horse had had enough of it; and never made a rush to get by in a narrow place—a piece of moderation which won him golden opinions from the quieter order of sportsmen; yet when he meant going, no kind of obstacle checked him. He refused nothing the animal under him was willing to attempt, though seldom pressing it beyond that point; thus avoiding what he declared to be the most fertile source of bad “spills,” viz., a want of unanimity between the rider and his steed.

"Look at most of the falls that occur," he said to some one who had remarked on his singular immunity from accidents. "It is not so much the brute's clumsiness or the man's imprudence, as the misunderstanding between them, that brings both the ground. The horse is too eager, and jumps before his master is prepared; or the latter is absorbed in his own share of the exploit, and omits to intimate his purpose distinctly to his dumb associate; and down they both go. If this creature," patting its neck, "obey me in the main, I do not deem it impolitic to humour him a little now and then; and when we are of one mind, we seldom come to grief, except through the intervention of others. No foresight or skill can prevent some careless fellow crossing you at the critical moment, or jumping on the top of you before you can get out of his way."

Whatever might be thought of Hyacinth's theory, his practice was admitted to be excellent. The horses that went so gallantly under him were eagerly bought up, though they were not always as guiltless of mischief in their purchasers' hands as they had been in his. Nor did his luck last for ever. He was one day riding a

fine chestnut mare of uncertain temper, which took fright at the slamming of a gate right in front of her, and began to rear in the most alarming manner, backing at the same time towards the trench which bounded the road on one side. "The pace was" not "too good" to prevent several gentlemen from pulling up to watch the struggle, and volunteer all sorts of contradictory advice. Hyacinth kept his seat so well that hopes were entertained of his escaping the threatened danger, till the mare, stepping back into the ditch, lost her balance, flung him violently across the rail beyond it, and fell over him.

The faint cry he uttered was almost drowned in the horrified murmur of the spectators. When extricated from the superincumbent mass, he gave no signs of life, though it did not appear that any of his limbs were fractured. A light cart and plenty of straw were procured from a neighbouring farm house, and he was driven with all speed to Ashby, which happened to be the nearest spot where medical aid could be obtained.

After a minute examination of the inanimate form submitted to him, the doctor pronounced



the spine to be most seriously injured, and on hearing the particulars of the accident, said it was a special mercy his back had not been broken outright. As it was, however, the case was bad enough. When Hyacinth, who was otherwise much bruised and shaken, recovered consciousness, he found himself extended on a couch, whence no hope was held out to him of ever rising again. His lower limbs were partially paralysed; he could not lift himself at all, nor bear to be lifted without extreme tenderness and caution; and this he was warned must be, with slight modification, his state for life.

It was some time before he realised the full import of that sentence. He was exclusively occupied at first with his hourly sensations, wants, and deprivations: a brief respite from suffering, a sound sleep, a meal partaken of without disrelish, are great events to a sick man, whose remotest future does not extend beyond to-morrow.—“If you are better to-morrow,” is the doctor’s formula, and the patient repeats: “To-morrow I am to sit up—to eat meat,” &c., &c. But when many to-morrows had passed over the disabled Leycester, and his general health recovered from the violent disturbance, he began to measure the

depth of the gulf into which he had fallen, and was appalled at the prospect before him. Reduced to utter helplessness, and incapacitated from following his only means of gaining a livelihood, he was dependent upon strangers for the commonest offices of life, and might soon lack wherewithal to recompense their attention.

It is difficult to convey a just idea of the amount of misery comprised in that single word—dependence. If it be a hard thing to bear when the blind or crippled person is surrounded by watchful relatives, and all the ingenious alleviations of wealth, what does it imply when he is alone with his affliction, cut off from sympathy, unable to secure the attendance his situation demands, haunted by the advancing shadow of destitution, and (as in this case) tortured by a thousand petty collisions between his fastidious habits and the sad necessities of his position.

He had made no friends; there was no human being on whose commiseration he possessed a special claim. An enquiry or two after his fate at the next meet, was met by the information that he had had a narrow escape of his life, and would never be fit for anything again, upon

which the softer-hearted sighed "Poor wretch!" and looked to see if their girths were tight.

Mr. Riddell was provoked at the loss of his clever coadjutor, and said, with perfect sincerity, that he would have given a ten-pound note rather than this should have happened; but visits of condolence were not in his line, nor could he be expected to pension every one whose constitution was damaged in his employment. He thought himself very liberal in paying Hyacinth's salary up to the quarter, instead of stopping it from the day on which he ceased to return an equivalent; and intimated pretty broadly that beyond this he could not stretch a generosity which it is scarcely necessary to state, the invalid never dreamed of soliciting.

Long and dreary were the hours he spent in total solitude, unvaried by occupation, uncheered by sympathy, unrelieved even by the chance of interruption. No one came near him except the doctor, and once or twice Richard, his quondam foe, whose enmity had been converted into reverential esteem.

"My missus, Sally, you know, wanted to come and help nurse you," said that newly-married husband, on one occasion, "she thought you

must be lonesome like, and want company; but I warn't a going to wait till the steed was stole, afore I shut the stable door," added he, with a knowing wink, "so I stepped round myself to see how you was getting on."

"Perhaps you are wise," replied Hyacinth with a faint smile. "Had she fulfilled her kind intention, I might have fallen in love with her."

How had the conceit been crushed out of him! Six weeks before he would have said: "She might have fallen in love with me."

A compassionate woman's presence would indeed have been a comfort! He had a perfect horror of his landlady, who handled him so roughly, and performed the small services requested of her so ungraciously, that he was glad to trouble her as little as possible. Still, in his circumstances, he could not dispense with her aid. If he wanted to be moved, to change his linen, to wash his hands, he was obliged to ask her assistance and wait her pleasure. His fire might get low, and he could not replenish it; the sun might glare full into his eyes, and he could not draw down the blind; a sudden shower might beat in upon his bed, and he could not shut the window; he might be pining for water

just beyond his reach, or craving for food until it suited her convenience to recollect and attend to him.

"I can't be always running up and down stairs," said she, when the doctor, a kind-hearted man, who felt much for his patient's desolate condition, took occasion to remonstrate with her touching some peculiarly flagrant neglect; "how is all the work of the house to be done while I am fiddle-faddling after him? He ought to have been took to a hospital, where they understands how to manage sick folk. I am sure I don't, for he never seems half satisfied with anything I do for him; though he don't pay extra for the trouble he gives. Indeed, for that matter, I should like to know where the rent is to come from, now that he's lost his situation."

The anxiety was not unreasonable, considering she got her living mainly by letting lodgings; but Mr. Weston thought her very mercenary to obtrude it quite so prominently. The fact was, she had never forgiven Hyacinth's cool reception of her first advances; and his evident repugnance to her ministrations inflamed her latent animosity. She had no tenderness for his delicate

frame, no respect for his patient endurance, no consideration for his manly pride, appearing even sometimes perversely unmindful of his lingering refinements, and bent on making him feel her importance. She brought him food as she thought fit, with little reference to his appetite or partialities; and her very cleanliness was often a source of temporary discomfort. It did not signify whether he was smothered with dust or distracted by noise, his room must be put to rights just when she chose; awake or asleep, he was dragged out of bed when she was in the humour to make it.

To heighten these *désagrémens* by the force of contrast, he remembered how fondly and assiduously he had been tended during his last illness; and each time that memory so reverted to blessings ill-appreciated and cast away, a flood of anguish swept across his soul, uprooting the stoical calmness he strove, on the whole successfully, to maintain. His state of mind might be compared to that of a shipwrecked mariner, left alone in mid ocean on a barren rock, and snatched from sudden destruction only to count the approaching footsteps of death. The magnitude of the disaster stifles all ordinary mani-

festations of grief; he is stunned into fortitude: why should he mourn to the waves, and scatter lamentations to the heedless wind? So he sits down, and awaits in gloomy silence the fate that is neither to be hastened nor averted. Yet if a sail flutter upon the horizon, if his listless eye fall upon some memento of home or kindred, how does every nerve, breaking the unnatural stillness, start back into fresh activity! He strains his voice in piteous cries that cannot reach those distant ears; he exhausts himself in frantic prayers to that heaven, which appears, alas! still less easy of access; he wrestles again with the strong agony of hope, until its last ray dies out, and he relapses, worn with emotion, into the stern apathy of despair.

This was Hyacinth's mood: he uttered no complaint, manifested no anxiety; a slight tremulousness of tone was the only indication of the mental conflicts that often shook his habitual serenity; but his was the passive heroism of the Indian at the stake, not the intelligent resignation of a Christian. He recognised the Divine Hand in his overthrow, and did not mutinously rebel against it; but he had not advanced so far in religion as to "kiss the rod." Chastise-

ment to him was penal, not reformatory; the sentence of an Almighty Judge, not the correction of a wise yet loving Father. Far from crediting the supreme Disposer of events with purposes of mercy towards him, he could not even fully acquiesce in the justice of the retribution dealt out, and in his dark moments was ready to cry out, not only, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," but "greater than I deserve." Admitting his various sins of omission and commission, it seemed hard, at twenty-five, to be thus visited with incurable infirmity, and laid aside, a stranded log upon the tide of life, while many whom he knew to be far greater adepts in wickedness were allowed to fare well and prosper, encountering scarce a token of reprobation, either from God or man. "I have sinned," was the confession of his conscience, but then came the question, "Why hast Thou set *me* as a mark, so that I am a burden to myself? And why dost Thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" His aching heart would willingly have added, "For now shall I sleep in the dust; and Thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be."

It was that idea of permanence that lent the



affliction its sharpest sting. A few weary months might have been dragged through, had the end been seen, even though that end were an unhonoured grave; but to think that he might vegetate thirty or forty years in this wretched condition, alternately drove him to the borders of distraction, and benumbed his faculties with dread. There was nothing in the nature of his malady to threaten (or promise) danger to the vital powers; his pulse beat regularly, his mind was clear; he was simply incapable of motion, like the prince in the Arabian tale, one half of whose body was of black marble. He suffered little or no pain, except when he attempted to turn himself, or sit up, without due support and assistance. At any exertion of that kind, a pang so excruciating shot through his frame, as frequently to deprive him of consciousness. This was an especial nuisance to Mrs. Crossley, who was apt to give him an awkward jerk when in a hurry, and grumbled immensely at the time it took to bring him to again.

"Have you no friends who could come to take care of you?" asked the doctor one day, after listening to a string of similar grievances downstairs, and finding his patient very much ex-

hausted with purely superfluous suffering. "The good woman below does not seem particularly expert in the sick-room. Could I write to any one on your behalf, if the effort is too much for you?"

Hyacinth met all such suggestions, at first, with a decided negative. He could not brook the thought of avowing that his grand scheme of independence had proved so palpable a failure, and appealing to the pity of those who had not shewn themselves over forward to serve him when they could have done so at far less cost.

"I can imagine the indolent Mrs. Aguilar, or the pompous Lady Wilfred Grafton, receiving a summons to perform the part of sick-nurse to a scamp of a brother in an elegant apartment like this!" he soliloquized. "Veronica would be a much more likely person to respond to such a call; but Heaven only knows in what region of the world she may be sojourning. If my mother had not married again . . . I wonder whether she would send me Azalea; but no, a girl under sixteen is too young for such a post, even if I had the means of accommodating her properly. Is it a special judgment upon me that of all those

who have petted and fondled me, not one should be at hand to help me in my sorest need? Ah! had I been true to the best of wives, how different would my lot have been!"

On arriving at which point, he was invariably seized with a fit of the deepest despondency, and would have been capable of refusing any solace, had it been offered.

As time wore on, however, the subject pressed itself more forcibly on his attention. It became no longer a question of sentiment, but of sheer necessity, that he should apply in some quarter for relief. He had entertained a notion of turning to account his knowledge of crochet-work, acquired during his sunny days as an excuse for idling in ladies' boudoirs; but after expending part of his slender store in the purchase of the necessary materials, and devoting himself indefatigably to the manufacture of some not very brilliant trifle, he was met by the difficulty of disposing of such articles, in a little town like Ashby, where the trades carried on were almost exclusively supported by male customers, and where fancy bazaars were things unknown. The kind doctor did his best to find a market for these productions, and kept one or two himself,

sooner than mortify the maker by returning them unsold; but crochet was evidently not to be reckoned upon as a source of revenue, and Hyacinth, at last, after many struggles, resolved on making his mother acquainted with his distress.

He would not shock her by revealing the full extent of his misfortune; merely stating that he had met with an accident which had confined him for some time to his bed, and entailed expenses greater than he was prepared to defray; and leaving it for her to decide what form her maternal solicitude should take. He was unwilling that his first communication with his family should be in the shape of a demand for money. This letter he sent to the post by Richard (who could not read the address), and waited in feverish anxiety for the result. Fifty times in a day did he calculate with elaborate minuteness the period requisite for the journey; and every footstep he heard approaching was hailed as the harbinger of his deliverance. He had taught himself to expect nothing less than the personal appearance of Mrs. Desart to rescue him from bondage, and was disappointed at receiving a written reply. It was in these terms:—

"MY DEAR SON,

"I was very sorry to hear of your indisposition, and hope you will soon be restored to health. Pray use this interval of seclusion in reflecting on your past errors, that so the trial may be blessed to your good. I forward you a small sum to enable you to meet the temporary embarrassment to which you allude; but you must not in future look to me for pecuniary assistance, which I could not give without making myself a party to proceedings which I disapprove, and encouraging you to persist in your improper separation from your wife. I would ask you to come here, when you get better, for change of air; but I fear our retired habits would not be to your taste. We were much pained by your absence from poor Eglantine's funeral. It was the subject of much remark, as showing in what light esteem you hold the members of your family. However, we do not cease to think kindly of you. Your sisters desire their best love; and with Mr. Desart's Christian remembrances, believe me,

"Your affectionate mother,

"FLORA DESART."

Enclosed was a five-pound note.

Hyacinth read the letter over twice, examined it carefully to make sure that the handwriting really was his mother's, and then deliberately tore it up into very little pieces. He felt half inclined to treat the enclosure the same way; but recollecting the claims of doctor and landlady, he denied himself that irrational satisfaction, and laid it up by him till the former came.

"Will you please to pay yourself out of this note?" he then said, producing it.

"I am in no hurry," answered the good man, whose yearly gains were barely sufficient to keep the wolf from his own door. "Don't break this on my account, unless it is perfectly convenient to you."

"Thank you," returned Hyacinth, indifferently, as if his bed were stuffed with bank paper. "I must change it shortly, and would rather you had your share."

Poor Mr. Weston looked admiringly at it, before he placed it in his pocket book. "Have you taken my advice and communicated with your friends?" he enquired.

"Yes," replied the young man, shortly, with such a sudden darkening of the brow, that the

observant doctor, perceiving he had touched upon a sore point, hastened to change the subject, and forbore to allude to it again. Had he suspected that the note entrusted to him was the only one the invalid had received, or was likely to receive, from that vague source, "his friends," Mr. Weston would not have retained that moderate portion to which his services were fairly entitled.

## CHAPTER XIII.

"O gods! Who is't can say, I am at the worst?"

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All weary and o'erwatch'd,  
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold  
This shameful lodging."

KING LEAR.

HYACINTH was re-plunged by this incident into the gloomiest dejection. Bitterly did he repent having subjected himself to a repulse, which made him feel more completely an outcast than before. He made a solemn resolution that no conceivable wretchedness should induce him again to risk a similar mortification; and half regretted that he had not kept the letter to refresh his indignation, in case he were ever weak enough to contemplate a second appeal. Henceforth he vowed to float passively down the stream of events, and let hunger, cold, sickness do their work. How did the very poor manage? Numbers of them were struck down every day by



fatal injuries, which left them incapable of earning their bread; what became of them, if they had no friends able, or willing, to contribute to their support? The very worst extremity, death by starvation, was scarcely more terrible in prospective than the indefinite prolongation of his present dreary existence.

He was much shocked at the news of his sister's decease. There had been no great attachment between them, but he had last seen her a gay bride, and her removal, the particulars of which were still unknown to him, created the first void in the family circle since the loss of its head.

The five pound note was soon spent. What should he do now?

"My clothes may as well be sold," said he to Mrs. Crossley; "I shall never want them any more, it seems."

He lived for some weeks upon his wardrobe, practising, of course, the most rigid economy, for this was his last resource. He tried to do without a fire, but though March had arrived, the weather was terribly cold; a keen east wind was continually blowing, while bitter black frosts defied the power of the sun, and almost

drove it from the sky. His dietary was already on the most meagre scale; and though he felt the want of nourishment less acutely than a robust person might, the doctor, who persisted, in spite of Leycester's hints, in paying him frequent visits, remarked a gradual falling off in his appearance, and half suspected how the case stood.

Hyacinth listened gravely to injunctions to "take plenty of food, and not let himself get too low;" never insinuating a doubt of his ability to obey them. It was purely by accident Mr. Weston discovered that his patient was not only reduced to hermit's fare, but really did not get as much of that as he could eat. Happening to call one day at the popular dinner hour, he found Hyacinth engaged upon a piece of dry bread, flanked by a cup of weak tea without milk or sugar. Indeed, the doctor at first mistook it for broth, which he represented would be a great improvement upon such washy stuff.

"Well, perhaps it would," assented the invalid, with an air of deliberation that puzzled Mr. Weston.

The next time he came, Mrs. Crossley did not

let him in herself; and mounting the stairs unannounced, he overheard a fragment of conversation which removed his uncertainty upon the subject. Hyacinth had found a penny in a corner where he did not expect a penny or any other coin to be, and was imploring the landlady to go and buy him a loaf with the same.

"By and by," quoth she; "I can get it as I come back from the market."

"But that will be two hours hence," urged Leycester's plaintive voice, "and I am so hungry!"

"Bless me!" cried the widow snappishly; "you don't surely expect me to leave my work, and run out on purpose for that? One would think you were starving! What would you have done if you had not lighted upon this precious copper, which I believe is only a halfpenny after all?"

"No, surely!" exclaimed Hyacinth, in an anxious tone.

Without waiting to learn the issue of the examination, Mr. Weston slipped down stairs again, got the barmaid at a neighbouring inn to cut him some substantial sandwiches, and re-

turning to Mrs. Crossley's, pulled them out of his pocket, saying :

"I brought my lunch out with me to-day, to save time. My cook has been uncommonly bountiful, I see. Can't you help me get through part of these, Ryder?"

The poor fellow made but a faint resistance; and encouraged by the doctor's example, helped to demolish the food set before him. Anything so good as those sandwiches, he never recollected to have eaten.

After this, Mr. Weston's ingenuity was often taxed to find excuses for making some addition to his *protégé's* miserably insufficient repasts. Either his cook had made some soup on a new receipt, which he would like Hyacinth to taste; or he had just received a present of real Bermuda arrowroot; or a country friend had sent him some new laid eggs; or did Hyacinth ever drink cocoa? he had bought some, and did not fancy it. Leicester began at last to surmise that all these windfalls could not be purely fortuitous; but the benefits were so delicately conferred, that it would have been ungracious to refuse, or to appear too painfully conscious of obligation. He could only express by inflec-

tions of voice, or intimate by mute glances and gestures, his profound gratitude for kindness which was never allowed to wear the aspect of charity.

Mr. Weston would gladly have done more, had it been in his power. It grieved him to see a fine young creature, evidently used to better things, pining away, with no one to soothe and cheer him, badly tended, and verging fast upon destitution. He could not afford to take on himself the entire charge of a person so hopelessly afflicted, nor even provide more regular and careful attendance; such small sums as he could spare he was afraid to wound his patient by offering; and if he should press upon him a loan, as a temporary accommodation, he foresaw that, unless a longer purse intervened, the difficulty was only removed one stage further. He could not continue to lend, even if Hyacinth consented to borrow, with no prospect whatever of repayment; and so the end must come at last.

What end?

While Mr. Weston was racking his brain with benevolent projects, Mrs. Crossley set her wits to work upon the problem, and arrived at a much more speedy solution.

"I don't want to be harsh," mused the widow. "If he was only a little behindhand with the rent, I'm sure I'd gladly wait till he was about again, and trust him to pay up as he was able. But the doctor says he won't never get over it; and there's no kinsfolk, as I can hear of, to come forward; and how is a lone woman, that's troubled to get her own living, to lodge and feed, and wash and do for a poor unfort'nate, that never will be able to earn a shilling? The parish ought to take him."

Mr. Weston was considerably startled at this conclusion, when it was imparted to him.

"Consign him to the poor-house!" exclaimed he, in horrified accents. "It is not to be thought of."

"It is the only thing to be done," insisted Mrs. Crossley.

"The parish might, perhaps, if the case were properly represented, grant some assistance."

"Yes, eighteen-pence a week and a loaf!" cried the widow in high disdain. "That's about all the assistance they'd give, I fancy, and he could not live upon that, forbye the rent."

Mr. Weston made a rapid mental calculation, and sighed to think he could not venture to guarantee the payment of £6 10s. a year.

"I have been planning a little subscription for his benefit," said he aloud, with some reluctance. "If I could collect even seven or eight pounds, your rent would be safe for the next twelve months, and we might manage between us to save him from pauperism."

"Ye—a, sir," hesitated Mrs. Crossley, "it's very good of you, I'm sure, sir, to be at the pains; but—you see—if I be to keep him entirely for good and all, I'd be expecting more than the half-crown a week. It don't pay me now for all the bother I have with him; and he is neither kith nor kin to me, nor to you neither, sir, for that matter; and so why should'nt we let him go upon the parish, at once, in the nat'ral course of events? It'll have to come to that, sooner or later, unless it pleases God to take him, which would be the best thing that could happen."

"Of that, the Almighty is the best judge," replied Mr. Weston, rather sternly. "It is not for us, Mrs. Crossley, to be too eager to throw off a burden which He has seen fit to cast upon us. Let us beware how we give Him occasion to say to us, at the great day, 'I was sick, and ye grudged me help; a stranger, and ye drove me from your door.'"

The widow was silenced for the moment, but she did not relinquish her idea. "In spite of Mr. Weston's talk," reasoned she, "I don't see what call I have to slave myself, supporting this young man, merely because he happens to fall ill in my house. What is the parish for, but to provide for them as can't provide for themselves? He won't like it, I dare say; but beggars musn't be choosers. To-morrow is board-day; I shall go and speak to the gentlemen about him."

Whereupon she put on her bonnet, and heedless of a feeble summons from up-stairs, started off to evening service—for Mrs. Crossley was a strict church-goer—heard a beautiful story read of a "certain Samaritan," who paused on his journey to succour a wounded traveller of a hostile faith and nation; and pronounced the preacher's comments on it very edifying. The next morning she went before the Board.

A good deal of opposition was made to her scheme. The proposed pauper did not belong to the parish; and a permanent charge upon the rates was, of course, resisted in every possible manner. All enquiries, however, failed to ascertain the district to which he did belong. He



could not tell where he was born, and had certainly not acquired an "industrial settlement" anywhere; the birth-place of his parents was a point he was still less able to elucidate; his last residence had been in France.

Mrs. Crossley was urgent, and pathetic. The poor soul could not be turned out to die in the streets, she averred; yet leave her lodgings he must, or she should come to ruin as well, and then the parish would have two to maintain, instead of one.

The upshot of it was, that an order was granted for his admission into the workhouse, the guardians reserving the power of obtaining reimbursement, should his legitimate domicile be hereafter discovered.

The widow's triumph was not unalloyed. She had an uneasy anticipation of Mr. Weston's censure, and did not quite relish the task of communicating her success to the person principally concerned, whose look, when the subject was first mentioned before him, still dwelt in her recollection.

The allusion had indeed revealed to him "a lower deep" than "the lowest depth" his mind had pictured. He had fathomed in imagination

the horrors of famine, and was prepared for the struggle: that he should eat the bread of charity, and sink into a pauper's grave, was an extremity he had not foreseen, and before which his spirit quailed. The anguish, however, that gnawed his soul found no vent in remonstrance or lamentation; he neither bemoaned himself, nor imprecated evil upon others; accused no one of harsh dealing, pleaded for no delay. Only when the hour of his removal came, and the fact, which perhaps had almost appeared as a hideous dream, confronted him in all its stern reality, he tossed his arms wildly over his head, murmuring,—“Oh, Anna, you are indeed avenged!” It was the anniversary of his duel with Mr. Bathurst.

A cart had been sent to convey him to the grim asylum of the destitute, which stood at some distance from the town. Two old men accompanied it, who assisted in placing him therein. No apparel was forthcoming to clothe the invalid, except an old paletot which served him as a dressing-gown; he was obliged to be wrapped in the blankets, and carried down on the mattress, as he lay. The operation, conducted with no

particular care, was a most painful one. Every step down those steep stairs sent a thrill through his whole frame, and forced a groan from his pallid lips.

It was characteristic of the chivalrous element in his composition, that when he could not speak without a sob, he gasped an apology to Mrs. Crossley for allowing her to bear part of his weight. Her last words were an injunction to the driver to be sure and return her bedding safe.

The tortures of that journey are not to be told. The air, motion, noise, would of themselves have been trying to nerves so long habituated to the quiet monotony of an indoor life: attended by every circumstance that could heighten the mischief, their effect was maddening. The jolting of the cart inflicted such torment that he grew faint under it, and was only roused from the oppressive torpor of coming sensibility by new and sharp throes. When utterance was possible, he implored a brief respite, a few minutes to regain breath; but the indulgence was of little avail, and could not be repeated without still further protracting the doleful transit. They drove slowly, in order not to aggravate his suf-

ferings; thus making up in duration what was saved in intensity, and exposing him still longer to the freezing atmosphere, against which he was so ill-defended. The piercing cold gradually benumbed his senses, and relaxed the strong gripe of agony. When they reached their destination, one of the old men, who had not been inattentive to his charge, doing what he could to mitigate his woes, was struck with the set look of his bloodless features, and the stillness which had succeeded his convulsive writhings.

"See here, Ned," cried he to his partner, "I doubt the lad be in a fit, his limbs be all stiff like, and his hand is as cold as a stone."

"Cold, indeed!" said the other, dropping the icy fingers he had taken. "Why, man, he's dead!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

"How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief?"

OTHELLO.

"She entered the door of the almshouse.

Hot and red on his lips still burned the flush of the fever,  
As if life, like the Hebrew, with blood had besprinkled its  
portals,

That the Angel of Death might see the sign, and pass over."

EVANGELINE.

EARLY the next afternoon, Mr. Weston paid a professional visit at the White Hart, and was re-descending the stairs, when a lady opened the door of her sitting room to ask how his patient was going on.

"Most favourably," was the answer, "in two, or at the utmost three days more, I think she may be moved without the slightest danger."

"Oh, she shall not be hurried," said the lady. "But you are looking very pale and exhausted, Mr. Weston. May I offer you a glass of wine?"

It was on the table: Mr. Weston accepted it.

"I do feel rather low to-day," he admitted: "I had a good deal yesterday to fatigue and harass me, and have not yet recovered the impression made on me by a distressing scene in which I was called to bear a part."

"Doctors are generally supposed to be hardened by familiarity with human suffering," observed the lady.

"Some forms of sorrow are always new," replied Mr. Weston. "This was a case in which I had taken more than ordinary interest"

"From the nature of the malady?"

"No, from circumstances connected with the patient, a young man employed in a large training stable here, who met with a frightful accident this winter, and injured his spine so much that he never sat up afterwards. You will smile, perhaps, at the idea of a doctor having artistic perceptions; but I confess I was doubly grieved at the damage done to so fair a form. As he lay extended before me, I was struck by the perfect symmetry of limbs, which, though on rather a small scale, might have served as models to a sculptor. The foot, especially, was a study, preserving all the beauty of a child's."

"He had probably spent half his life in the saddle, and seldom walked."

"Possibly; yet his hands presented the same evidence of exemption from rough usage, and taken in conjunction with various minute refinements of manner and habits, they helped me to the conviction that he belonged by rights to a very superior class of society, whence he had fallen by folly, or been driven by disaster."

"What is his name? whence did he come?" asked, with sudden interest, the lady who had hitherto listened to the story for the narrator's sake.

"His name is Ryder," answered the doctor. "His employer picked him up abroad, I understood; beyond that fact no one knows anything of his antecedents. He never volunteered any confidence, and I did not like to pry into his secrets; though when I saw him enduring such privations, I longed to try the effect of an appeal to his kindred."

"Was he then reduced to such extreme indigence?"

"Alas! yes. His salary of course ceased with the power to earn it, and as he had no other

resource, want soon darkened his desolate hearth. I could do little to help him, and that only by stealth, for he shrank from revealing his need. While I, with perhaps overstrained scrupulousness, hesitated to beg on his behalf from those who had wealth to spare, his landlady grew impatient and talked of the workhouse. I did my best to dissuade her, and was engaged the greater part of yesterday in bringing the case to the knowledge of some whom I thought likely to contribute to his relief. What was my dismay to find, on my return, that the threatened step had been already taken, and with the least possible regard to his feelings or his comfort!"

The hearer's countenance proclaimed her sympathy, and, after a moment's pause, Mr. Weston continued:

"You know what a bleak afternoon it was. I myself, well wrapped up and in vigorous health, felt the cold severely. Imagine what it must have been for him, dragged from a sick bed, with nothing but a blanket to cover him, and driven upwards of a mile in an open cart without springs,—he, who could not turn on his side without excruciating pain! I am only surprised he did not expire on the road."



"He did survive then."

"Yes; he was alive when they got him into the house, just alive, though even that was long doubtful. It was full two hours before anything like animation was restored; and when I arrived there about eight o'clock, he was still in a most critical state, hovering between life and death. I sat and watched the conflict till past midnight, when the foe retreated for the moment, and left the field to me. I went home at last very thankful for the victory; and yet, poor fellow, it might have been kinder to let his tormented soul escape its prison."

"Nay, let us hope that brighter days are in store for him. What money can do to relieve his sufferings shall not be wanting. How is he going on? Have you seen him this morning?"

"Oh, yes; I went to the infirmary the first thing, and found him, if not better, at least no worse than I expected. He had been very restless all night, with rheumatic pains about him, and there were symptoms of fever which augur ill for the future; but just then he was more composed, and his mind was clear—too clear, I was going to say—for he is keenly sensible of his degradation."

"Surely that part of his burden may be eased

at once. I know with what repugnance the very humblest classes accept the shelter of the workhouse; if your *protégé* be, as you suppose, of higher origin, the indignity must be doubly bitter. I will gladly defray the expenses of removing him carefully; and if, by the blessing of Heaven, your skill enable him to surmount this crisis, we will concert measures for his permanent benefit."

"I duly appreciate your benevolence, dear Madam, and will certainly not reject the aid Providence bestows by your hand, though I fear it is not possible to carry your scheme into immediate execution. After all my patient has recently undergone, it would hardly be safe to disturb him again so soon. He is not so badly accommodated, if he could but overcome the idea of degradation: and I have bespoken the special attention of one of the nurses. However, we will see what can be done. I am on my way there now, with a treasure, the recovery of which will afford him a gleam of satisfaction. He always kept it under his pillow, it seems, but in the confusion of moving yesterday it was left behind at his lodgings, where I have been to look for it, at his earnest request. Some love-token, I expect."

Saying which, the doctor drew from his pocket a fine cambric handkerchief, delicately embroidered with the initials "A. L."

Anna Leycester (for it was she) took it from his hand, and her heart stood still as she recognised it, by some peculiarity in the workmanship, for her own; how lost, she had never been able to ascertain, forgetting that she had bound it over her husband's shoulder when she found him bleeding on the sofa, after the interview with the Bathursts in March of the previous year. Mr. Weston was astonished at the emotion he had innocently excited.

"I must see this person," cried Mrs. Leycester, starting from her chair; "I must learn how he became possessed of . . . . Good God! if it should be himself!" And down she sat again, covering her face.

In the tumult of ideas that rushed over her, the joy of finding herself at last on her husband's track, was overwhelmed by a dreadful misgiving that he might be the hero of the sad story which had awakened her profoundest pity when related of a stranger. Hyacinth, of whom it might almost be said that he "would not adventure to set the sole of his foot on the ground for tenderness and delicateness," a prey to sick-

ness and poverty! striving to earn a subsistence, and failing in the attempt! solitary, neglected, destitute; racked by cruel pangs; smarting, perhaps, under insolence and harsh treatment; and, finally, cast forth, with no more ceremony than would be used with worthless lumber, to close his eyes in a workhouse! The picture was too shocking, it could not be true.

What evidence was there, after all, of identity? This Ryder looked like a gentleman,—there might be many a well-born spendthrift in similar circumstances; and had a small foot,—a trait which had forcibly reminded her of one, of whom it was popularly reported, that Hubert only charged him for his boots as “lady’s size.” The handkerchief might have come into his hands in many ways; yet why should he set such store upon it, unless for the associations connected therewith?

“You have not told me what this young man is like,” she said at last, with as much calmness as she could muster; “whether he is fair or dark, sallow or florid?”

The wondering doctor, premising that he was not good at description, did his best to sketch a verbal portrait, Mrs. Leycester devouring every

word as it fell from him, and murmuring at intervals, "It must be! It must be!"

After another lapse of troubled silence, she again spoke: "I am taxing your patience severely, Mr. Weston. The fact is, I believe I have discovered in your *protégé* a near and dear kinsman, whose fate has long been involved in mystery. You who have hitherto been so kind a friend to him, will, I trust, lend me your assistance to rescue him from his present deplorable condition. He must not remain an hour longer under that inhospitable roof. I will give instant orders for his reception, if you will complete your charitable work by conveying him hither with all due precaution."

"This is indeed good news," said the worthy man. "But is there no possibility of a mistake, my dear Madam? Because it would be awkward for you, and a sad disappointment to him, if he should turn out after all not to be the object of your solicitude. Had you not better see him before you take any further steps in the matter?"

Anna hesitated. "We have not met for some time," she objected. "Might not the excitement be dangerous? I would prefer,

if possible, to keep in the background just at first."

"I am considering whether it would be practicable to afford you a glimpse of him without his being aware of your vicinity. If we could catch him asleep, now, that would be an excellent opportunity. What do you say to accompanying me to the spot, on the chance of it?"

"I am quite willing to go with you, though I have scarcely a doubt on the subject," replied Anna.

The proposal suited well with her restless mood; she could not have borne to sit quietly waiting the result of investigation by proxy. In a very short time she was driving with Mr. Weston to the parish infirmary, both of them in considerable flurry and agitation.

"What is the connection, I wonder?" ruminated the doctor. "He is too young for her husband, too old for her son; a favorite brother, perhaps, though I don't perceive any likeness.— Now for the settlement of this question," he added aloud, as the carriage stopped at the door.

On entering the hall, he encountered the

nurse to whom he had specially commended Hyacinth, and called to her: "Well, Peggy, how is the new-comer?—any change either way?"

"I was wishing for you to look in, sir," said she. "He's been getting worse ever since you saw him, and is quite unsensible in his head."

"What, delirious?" cried the doctor.

"I dare say that's the word, sir. He don't seem clear where he is, or who it is speaks to him; but mutters to hisself, and moans, and never lies still an instant."

Mr. Weston stepped back to the carriage with a grave face. "You need not be kept here in suspense, Madam," he said. "It appears my unhappy patient is no longer cognisant of what goes on around him. I will therefore introduce you into the house, if you please, without delay."

Anna followed him with a beating heart into the apartment where she half hoped, half dreaded to find her adored, though forsaken spouse. Mr. Weston stopped before one of the many beds it contained, and motioned her to approach and look.

It was indeed Hyacinth she beheld on that lowly couch; poor crushed flower! with broken

stem and tarnished leaves, bowed to the earth by the pitiless storm, yet beautiful even in decay. The flush of fever was on his cheek; his blue eyes shone with more than natural lustre, but there was no meaning in their gaze; his head and arms, the only parts of his body he could move freely, were perpetually tossing to and fro, as though in vain attempts to emancipate himself from the chains that bound him to his pillow. His wife stood, with tightly clenched hands, perusing every line of the well-remembered features; there was no necessity to ask if this was the friend she sought. She had put a strong constraint upon herself, and seemed afraid to speak or move, lest the mask should fall off.

From this statue-like posture she was roused by the nurse, who came to administer some medicine. Though pronounced by Mr. Weston the best of the lot, and possessed of a not unpleasing countenance, Peggy's appearance by no means agreed with Mrs. Leycester's notion of a *garde-malade*. She was extremely stout, and entirely shapeless, had a red face, and smelt of spirits. There was no danger, perhaps, of her ill-treating her helpless charge, but she lugged



him about and handled him so unceremoniously, that Anna was horrified. Hyacinth shrank, with evident aversion, as much from the woman as the draught, and energetically resisted her endeavours to force it between his teeth.

"Be gentle with him, pray!" implored Mrs. Leycester, unable to remain a passive spectator of the struggle; "or, stay, let me manage him."

Substituting her encircling arm for Peggy's, she took the cup from her, coaxed him to drink by such tender wiles as mothers use, wiped his lips softly with her handkerchief, and then, moved by an irresistible impulse, kissed them. He glanced wistfully up at her, as though with a dim consciousness of something familiar in her voice or touch; but he could not grasp the idea distinctly, his scattered senses only recognising that both were agreeable. He stroked her shawl approvingly, and laid his throbbing temples upon it, with a murmur of satisfaction. Then the flood-gates were loosened, and Anna's tears poured down like rain over the precious head so long divorced from its natural resting-place. Mr. Weston considerably drew off the nurse, and busied himself with other patients till the shower had passed.

These duties accomplished, he asked Mrs. Leycester when she proposed returning to the hotel?

"As soon as this poor invalid is ready to accompany me," was the reply.

"My dear lady, you cannot seriously contemplate such a measure. Transport him carefully as we might, the operation must be productive of some pain and much excitement, either of which is singly sufficient to fan this incipient fever into a deadly flame."

"Why not employ chloroform?" suggested Anna, nothing daunted. "Will not that render him insensible to all our proceedings? My carriage is very easy; he can be laid along the seat; we would drive very fast; all would be over in a quarter of an hour."

Mr. Weston was not a young man, and had little relish for the inventions of modern science. He had witnessed the marvellous effects of that powerful anæsthetic, and administered it once himself in a desperate case; but it was an experiment he shrank from repeating; the risk appeared to him too great to be lightly incurred. Mrs. Leycester, however, declaring her readiness to abide the result, and answer-

ing satisfactorily divers questions as to her husband's general constitution, Mr. Weston consented to administer chloroform; and proposed that while the requisite preparations were making, Anna should return to Ashby to get all in readiness for his reception.

"Persons sometimes look very ghastly under the influence of chloroform," represented he. "Their limbs become rigid, and their eyes turn up; you will be frightened, and lose your own presence of mind."

"I authorise you to pay me no manner of attention if I do," said Anna; "but nothing that I can witness will be more terrible than suspense."

"But you will be tired of sitting here among all these dismal sights and sounds."

"I will never leave him again," said Anna solemnly, turning towards her newly-found consort, as though taking him to witness of the vow.

The tone admitted of no reply, so she remained by his side till the proper arrangements were completed. Everything about the ward, she observed, was perfectly clean and orderly, though it was pervaded, as such establishments usually are, by an indescribable smell of poul-

tice. Rows of small iron bedsteads ran along each side of the apartment, with a broad space between each row, and a narrower interval between each bed. There were no curtains, nor partitions of any kind, so that each patient lay in full view of all the rest, and had no means of concealing his grief or his infirmities. How distressing such absolute publicity must have been to a person of Hyacinth's fastidious habits, Anna could well conjecture. It was one of those minor aggravations of a great calamity which are lost sight of by the distant spectator, though not unfelt by the actual sufferer; one of the *petits maux* which help to "*égratigner les grandes blessures pour en redoubler la cuisson.*"

The nurses, who all exhaled an odour of alcohol, did not seem unkind to their charges, though sympathy, of course, was not to be expected at their hands. When any of the sick bemoaned himself too audibly, the plan was to pat the quilt, and advise him to "keep quiet and go to sleep."

Diverted for a moment from her own particular concern in the scene, Mrs. Leycester sighed to think of the great volume of misery to which each pallet before her contributed its

separate page. The bed next Hyacinth's was filled by a child of twelve years of age, who had stolen away from his native village from fear of punishment for some act of boyish mischief, and after wandering about the country for a whole month, applied for a night's shelter at the Ashby workhouse, where he had since remained, in the last stage of exhaustion. A low fever, which no care or skill could arrest, was consuming his young life, and it was pitiful to hear how his disordered mind rambled back to his home and the cause of his flight.

"Have you been able to discover his friends?" asked Mrs. Leycester of the nurse who told her this sad little history.

"Yes, ma'am; we made out that he had an aunt living at Ashby St. Martin, and sent for her. She comes to see him regular, and brings him whatever he fancies, for the doctor, he says it don't matter now what he eats, poor lamb. I daresay she would send him home, but Lord bless you, ma'am, he couldn't stand the journey; the first turn of the wheels would shake all the breath out of him."

"Anna!" cried a voice from the couch she had momentarily quitted. She looked hastily round.

"That's your good gentleman's way, ma'am," explained Peggy. "He's always a calling 'Annar.'"

"Come back," pursued the unconscious speaker. "Indeed, I did not love her. 'Can a mother forget her child, that she should not have compassion . . . Yea, they may forget.' I read it in your book, Anna. Is everything in it true? Where is that handkerchief? She ought not to keep it. No fire; I cannot afford . . . Heavens! how cold it is!"

He broke off with a shiver, and thrust his burning hand into Mrs. Leycester's, as she bent over him to catch his incoherent sentences.

It was a great relief to her when Mr. Weston appeared, with an instrument very like a flat-iron hollow at the bottom. This cavity was just fitted to receive the patient's nose and mouth; the chloroform was poured in at an orifice in the handle, and in a few seconds began to take effect. The sensation was probably not a pleasant one, for he made an effort to push away the utensil; but the doctor caught his arm. His fingers closed convulsively upon the object thus presented to them, and all further resistance was at an end.

The method of proceeding having been previously settled, was swiftly and dexterously carried out. Not a single twitch of the muscles denoted the slightest suffering as he was borne down the stairs, and placed in the carriage; nor again when he was transferred from the vehicle to the bed prepared for him at the hotel, though the effect of the vapour was working itself off by that time, and he said afterwards that he both saw and heard what was going on, only as in a dream. No ill consequences were afterwards discernible; he woke up gradually, rather better than worse for the temporary abatement of his too rapid pulse, the utter extinction for the moment of faculties which were but so many sources of discomfort. A slight degree of languor was the only alarming symptom in the case; but Mr. Weston did not quit him till all uneasiness on this score was dissipated. He then, declining Mrs. Leycester's pressing invitation to partake her hasty dinner, took his leave, with strict injunctions to send for him instantly if any signs of faintness reappeared.

"I am powerless to express my deep obligation to you, Mr. Weston," said Anna, as she extended

her hand; "besides the gratitude owing to you on Mr. Leycester's behalf, which is already too heavy for verbal acquittance, I am a debtor on my own account; for had it not been for you, I might have passed unwittingly through the town, leaving behind me, in want and misery, one who is dearer to me than aught else on earth."

"I am amply repaid by the knowledge that one stricken mortal, at least, is snatched from the depths of poverty and woe. As to my share in bringing about this happy event, it was your ready sympathy that encouraged me to relate a narrative, the overwhelming importance of which to you personally I could not possibly conjecture. Farewell for to-night; I shall call early to-morrow morning."

"His name is Leycester too, it seems," mused the doctor, as he wended his way homewards, tired in body, but greatly relieved in mind. "But in what relation he stands to her, I am as much at a loss as before. He is *not* her brother, I am sure, by the way she embraced him. Women don't kiss their brothers so."

And the elderly-bachelor heaved an involuntary sigh.



## CHAPTER XV.

"I have thee now,  
With thy sweet eyes and angel brow,  
Thy seraph smile;  
And I can kiss thy downy cheek,  
And feel the love I ne'er can speak,  
And weep the while."

C. GASCOIGNE.

"Le hasard, c'est Dieu."

A. DE GONDRECOURT.

It was not until she was left alone with him that Mrs. Leycester realised the fact of her husband's restoration to her. Her feelings up to this point had been so complicated, that she had not been able to distinguish one from the other. Surprise at the discovery so unexpectedly made, was quickly absorbed in the harrowing remembrance of his sufferings; joy at finding him at all was strangely mingled with grief at finding him in such a situation; suspense and certainty, delight, misgiving, love, sorrow, fear, thanksgiving, succeeded each other too rapidly to allow any one of them free scope.

There was, moreover, neither time nor place for sentimental indulgence; it was necessary to act promptly. In spite of the confidence she professed, she had been horribly frightened when the chloroform began to take effect. "If he should not revive!" was an awful thought to cross her mind at the critical moment. When the danger was fairly over, came a twinge of disappointment that he did not recover the powers of memory and observation as well as those of sight and speech. The next moment she rejoiced at circumstances which enabled her to satisfy without reserve the tenderness with which her heart overflowed. Finally, she was seized with an impatient longing to have him all to herself; and no sooner had the door closed upon Mr. Weston, than she fell upon, and well-nigh devoured the defenceless invalid.

He submitted, with a kind of gracious resignation, to caresses with which he had once been familiar; and was evidently soothed by the process, though the agent remained unknown. While she moistened his lips, and bathed his temples, reduced his tangled locks to order, and sprinkled him with eau-de-cologne, he lay tranquilly gazing at her proceedings; and when she

had built him a nest of pillows, he showed his appreciation of it by going comfortably to sleep.

Then Anna tore herself away to take a hurried meal, returning with fresh ardour to his side; and there she sat the livelong night, unconscious of the lapse of time, oblivious of fatigue, wrapt up in the contemplation of her bliss. She was obliged to get up sometimes and touch him, to convince herself that it was no dream, and that Hyacinth's very self was before her. He was restless at intervals, breaking out into lamentations, and disjointed talk; but was soon pacified, and after quenching for the moment his insatiable thirst, relapsed into a quiet dose.

Mr. Weston, who called early the next morning, was surprised to find him so composed, and warned Mrs. Leycester to beware of a sudden recognition, as it was very likely his mind would clear if his pulse continued to moderate.

"You will want a nurse," added the doctor. "I have spoken to one whom I know to be trusty and experienced; she will present herself by-and-by for your approbation."

Anna would willingly have dispensed with

such a functionary; she was jealous of anyone coming between her and her treasure, and grudged others the exquisite satisfaction of ministering to his wants. But she fell in (as we all do) with the rational and common-place arrangement, and bargained with a decent female to share with her for hire, an office compared with which, in her eyes, the joys of Paradise were tame.

Mr. Weston's caution was justified. Towards mid-day a ray of intelligence again brightened Hyacinth's vacant eyes. He stared about him, first with lazy unconcern, then inquisitively, and finding nothing to assist recollection, asked where he was. The newly-installed attendant replied:

"At the White Hart."

His confused intellects required time to digest that piece of information before they led him to the next question: how came he there? Which the nurse, not precisely knowing (for Mr. Weston had not judged it necessary to tell her the whole story), could not positively assert.

Having arrived at this point, Hyacinth was greatly fatigued with his mental exertions, and laid by until the doctor paid his second visit.

The sight of that gentleman aroused a host of reminiscences, all jumbled together, like a heap of unstrung beads. Mr. Weston furnished a clue by which he found his way, step by step, to the parish infirmary; how he emerged thence he looked to his only friend to elucidate.

The doctor, with a good deal of circumlocution, gave him to understand, first, that a lady was the chief agent in the transaction, and secondly, that her name was Leycester.

"My mother!" exclaimed Hyacinth, who had never been able to think of his parent by any other title. "She has relented then, and come in search of her prodigal. Where is she? will she not come to me?"

"If you will not excite yourself too much, I will permit the interview," said Mr. Weston, who accordingly notified to the supposed mother that Mr. Leycester was aware of her neighbourhood, and was most anxious to see her.

Anna was gratified at the request, which seemed to clear away some of the difficulties she had anticipated. Nevertheless it was with much nervous trepidation she entered his apartment, and advanced to receive his greeting. His countenance changed as he recognised her.

"Anna!" he faltered, drawing back with extreme astonishment, combined with many other emotions; "I thought—I understood—" He could not utter another syllable.

Anna's heart sank. "You are disappointed," she said mildly; "I am not, it appears, the person you expected to see. Believe me, I would not have intruded on you, but for—"

"Intruded!" said Hyacinth, rallying his faculties. "Oh, Anna, that is not a word for you to employ to me. My poor weak brain must have misapprehended the doctor's statement, for it certainly was my mother whose hand I thought to clasp—thus. How indeed could I surmise that the form I dimly saw flitting about me this past night, was the one I have so often pined to behold?"

"May I credit your words?" said Mrs. Leicester, yielding to the gentle force that drew her towards him. "Does my presence really inspire you with no aversion? Will you suffer me to resume a post I deserted in a moment of irritation, and generously forgive the injuries my departure, I fear, entailed upon you?"

"Let there be no mention between us of offences," said Hyacinth in a smothered voice.

"I have learnt, in a hard school, to read my conduct in a truer light, to value that which I threw away. Dearest Anna, if my errors were great, my punishment has been severe. Have pity upon me, and do not leave me to die unwept."

He stretched out his arms; she bent down over him, and was folded in a close embrace.

There was much to be explained on both sides; but all the reader requires to hear of the conversation is, how Mrs. Leycester came to be in the right place at the right time to redress the wrongs of destiny, and rescue her husband from his most painful position.

"What on earth brought you to Ashby St. Martin?" was his very natural enquiry.

"One of those incidents," replied Anna, "which we call chances, for want, perhaps, of a better word. A very old friend of mine returning lately from the continent, where she had passed many years, sent me a pressing invitation to visit her at Dalston Court, about six or seven miles from here—"

"I know it, I have taken horses out there often," cried Hyacinth.

"Twice I declined, for I had no room even for friendship in my pre-occupied mind; but at

the third summons I yielded. I have always had a kind of superstition against resisting that force of circumstance, which may be, for aught we can tell, the leading of a higher power; although I was far from presaging that Lady Dalston's pertinacity was in fact the voice of Providence calling me hither. So inextricably are the greatest and smallest events of life linked together! Who can tell what might have been the consequences of my adhering to my somewhat indolent refusal to undertake this particular journey at that particular time."

"You were on your road thither, then?"

"No, I had paid my visit, and was on my way to the station at Leicester, when I observed that my maid was very unwell, and desired the postillion to stop at the nearest inn, to see what could be done for her. He drove us hither; we set her down by a blazing fire (for it was very cold travelling), and plied her with brandy and water; but she got no better, and having the fear of cholera before my eyes, I sent for a doctor, your friend, Mr. Weston, who ordered her to bed, and said that the proper course had been adopted not a moment too soon. I did not



like to leave the poor thing among strangers, so I gave up my journey and resolved to remain in this sequestered nook until she was well enough to accompany me. I was rather provoked at first at being detained in so very unattractive a region; little dreaming how much depended on my presence on this spot."

"But how came Weston to mention me to you? for I conclude that he was the channel of communication. He could not know my name, or guess the interest it would excite in you."

"That also was a mere accident. He had just left you, and had been so much moved at the sight of your sufferings, that the subject still lay uppermost in his mind. A casual remark of mine elicited some particulars, which induced me to enquire further, and when he produced a handkerchief marked with my initials, the case was complete."

"'God moves in a mysterious way,'" said Hyacinth, after an interval of silent reflection. "But for what I thought the crowning stroke of disaster, it seems, the tale would never have reached your ear. Had my landlady been a whit less eager to get rid of me, I might have

languished unnoticed within sight almost of your windows, and never have heard that you had been so near."

Here Mr. Weston's entrance put an end to a colloquy which had lasted three or four hours.

"I only hope my patient has not been talked to death," was his half sarcastic comment. "You should have borne in mind, my dear madam, that he has not been used of late to female society. One such visit from you is enough to undo the benefit of three of mine."

"We had so much to say," pleaded Anna, with a guilty blush. "You do not think it will harm him?"

"H—m," responded the oracle, turning towards the sick bed.

Hyacinth certainly looked radiant just then; his features were quite changed by the revolution of feeling that had taken place within him. His pulse, however, was higher than it should have been: absolute quiet was enjoined for the rest of the evening. He passed an indifferent night, and continued to grow worse during several succeeding days.

It was a trying period for all those, who with different degrees of solicitude watched by his

couch. His life was at no time in imminent danger, but he was very ill, and his sufferings were distressing to witness. From prolonged exposure to the cold on that fatal day, rheumatism had taken firm hold of his limbs, and the pain kept him in a constant fever, which sometimes ran to an alarming height.

Anna was cut to the heart at the spectacle; she accused herself as the author of every pang. "If I had not left him, this would never have happened," was the thought that gave her no peace; and now she was condemned to stand helplessly by, and look upon anguish she could not relieve. Had he been stretched on his sick bed by a direct act of her own, she could hardly have felt more guilty. She suffered not only for him but with him; so that when the violence of the malady at last abated, she was sensible of actual physical relief, as well as of thankfulness on his behalf, and the consequent removal of a weight from her conscience.

It was some comfort to her, that in his delirious fits he seldom invoked any name but hers; though in these unguarded moments she learnt more of his recent desolation than he would voluntarily have revealed. She refrained from

alluding afterwards to these disclosures, being actually afraid to hear all he had undergone, and not liking to dwell upon a theme, which could not but recall disagreeable and humiliating associations.

It was only his pride she was anxious to spare. On her own account she was so insensible to the effect produced by her bringing a near relative from the workhouse, that the awkwardness never occurred to her, until suggested by her maid, now convalescent.

"People do talk so about it, ma'am," remarked the worthy abigail, proceeding to narrate the various editions of the story, current in the servants' hall, the stable-yard, and the bar-parlour.

"Well, Ford, it is unpleasant, no doubt, to have one's private affairs discussed in this way," said Mrs. Leycester, "but I don't see how it is to be prevented. People will talk. Our only plan is to furnish them with as few materials as possible."

"Then what would you wish me to say, ma'am, when I hear these things spoken of?"

"Say nothing, my good girl; let the fire die out for want of fuel. You are not supposed to

know much.—Mistress Ford, I can see, is dying to know more,” continued Anna to herself; “but if I indulged her with particulars, she would tell them all to the other servants as soon as we get home, and Cinthy would not like that. It is of no use attempting to stifle the gossip here; if I had bribed the postboy who drove us to hold his tongue, the truth would have leaked out from other quarters. The worst way to keep a secret is to make a mystery of it; one does but sharpen the edge of curiosity.”

With which reflection Anna dismissed the subject, concerning herself no further as to what was said or thought by the world without; and this not from any affected indifference, but from real inability to retain the matter in her memory. She did recollect to enquire after the sick child, whose story was connected in her mind with Hyacinth’s rescue, and, hearing that the little wanderer was gone to his last home, shuddered to think how soon her beloved one might have slept beside him; but with this exception, nothing beyond the walls of one sick room, possessed the slightest power of riveting her attention. She no longer complained that the town was dull, or deplored the defective supply of

books and newspapers. What were the chances of European peace or war to her, compared with the variations of her husband's health? What marvel of nature or art could afford her such satisfaction as the sight of his brightening countenance? What fiction surpassed in romantic pathos the plot she was helping to work out? Had he but been free from pain, she would have desired no change; that consideration alone prevented her cheerful acquiescence in a state of things which had brought them together, and bid fair to keep them united.

When he ceased to suffer so acutely, she was half reconciled to his helplessness, by the opportunities it afforded her of being useful to him; something like the feeling which binds the mother so strongly to the infant dependent on her for sustenance and protection, animated the doting wife's breast. She was dreadfully frightened at first on seeing him faint while she was lifting him, not knowing what mischief she might have done; but she soon learnt to handle him dexterously, and was indefatigable in endeavours to lessen the tedium of confinement.

The patience with which he submitted to every *désagrément* of his lot, astounded Mrs.

Leycester, who had known him very intolerant of minor evils, and was prepared for much fretfulness and vain repining; instead of which he made no complaint, struggled uncomplainingly through his bad times, was thankful for any alleviation, and refrained, as Anna thought, too scrupulously, from expressing desires which it was her constant study to gratify. She was uncertain whether to attribute this passive mood to prostration of mind and body, or to a want of confidence in his position. It distressed her that he should regard as an obligation what she wished him to consider as a right and a matter of course; if he hesitated to avail himself of all the advantages wealth could procure, it must be because he still recognised a distinction of interests between them. The taunt she had flung at him haunted her memory like an avenging spectre. There are few weapons of offence that do not recoil upon the user:—"He that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."

Hyacinth's resignation, however, proceeded neither from utter exhaustion, nor from any such refinement of pride as we have hinted above. The simple fact was that, compared with all he had escaped, his present circum-

stances appeared to him the height of felicity; the blessings bestowed eclipsed, for the time at least, the disadvantages under which he laboured; and if he exacted so little from those in attendance upon him, it was because he had not yet grown familiar with the novelty of being so well served. The commonest comforts of life had become luxuries to him; there was positive enjoyment to be derived from everything he saw, touched, or tasted; and even in his sharpest pangs he was cheered by the assurance of sympathy, the certainty that nothing was neglected for his relief.

Anna noticed, with secret rejoicing, indications of greater thoughtfulness in his remarks. Not that he spoke much of the inward conflict through which he had passed, or dealt in the set phrases by which the convert often thinks it necessary to proclaim his new principles; but notwithstanding Hyacinth's reserve, a deeper sense of spiritual things was distinctly perceptible. He not only consented to hear a passage or two of Scripture occasionally read to him—a proposal introduced by Mrs. Leycester with extreme diffidence,—but lent a willing attention, and insensibly drew her on to converse upon the most



important of topics. If she was sometimes confounded at the crudity of his ideas, at the dense ignorance on many vital points of a man not otherwise ill-informed, she was as often surprised at the progress he had made, and his ready acceptance of such truths as he understood. He had studied the Bible a good deal during his lonely hours, but wanted a key to unlock some of its choicest stores.

Fearful of not guiding him aright, Anna wished to send for an authorised expounder of the Word; but Hyacinth stoutly refused to be "dogmatised over by any ecclesiastic whatsoever. Not one of them came to look after me when I was a stray sheep," he averred. "What I want is not the strong meat of doctrine, much less the sugar plums of fanciful theology, but just the pure milk of the Gospel; and surely no one is so fit to administer that as a true-hearted woman. Read me the story about that young scamp who left his home to riot after his own fashion, and came to grief."

The request was lightly preferred, but he listened with becoming reverence, and did not speak for some time, when, sliding his hand into his wife's, he said softly :

"I don't think that prodigal ever gave his father cause to repent having taken him back again; do you, Anna?"

She doubtless divined the mental application he had made of the parable. There is no need to specify her response.

## CHAPTER. XVI.

*Hel.* My art is not past power, nor you past cure.

*King.* Methinks, in thee some blessed spirit doth speak.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

"You will wish to have some further advice," said Mr. Weston one day to Mrs. Leycester. "Now that our patient is pretty well restored to his normal state, in point of general health, you may consider it expedient to consult a physician of eminence on the subject of the spinal affection."

"The idea had occurred to me," replied she; "but I hesitated to propose a measure which seemed like taking the case out of your able hands."

"Such punctilio need not stand in the way for a moment, my dear madam. It implies no reproach to me that I am less skilled in this branch of medical knowledge than those who

have devoted themselves specially to it. If you have no friend of your own on whose opinion you rely, I was going to recommend a gentleman who enjoys a great reputation for his treatment of spinal complaints."

"I shall be obliged to you," said Anna; "but is there, then, really a chance of my poor invalid's recovering the effects of his accident? I understood from him that you had given him no hope of amelioration."

"I did not certainly; nor would I now lightly raise expectations that may be doomed to disappointment; but the case presents a somewhat different aspect from what it did when I pronounced that verdict. Mr. Leycester now possesses the means of trying remedies which could not possibly be applied in his then condition. What was the use of my issuing orders which there was no one to execute, or summoning physicians whose prescriptions he could not afford to carry out? I do not assert, mind, that any amount of ability will succeed in restoring him the free use of his limbs; but wealth can do wonders, and it is at least worth a trial."

"Worth a trial!" cried Anna. "The chance is worth a pilgrimage round the world. Every

shilling I possess would be a small price to pay for such a benefit."

"We must not be too sanguine," said the doctor smiling. "However, with your permission, I will write to Dr. Brown, and hear what he thinks of the matter."

Dr. Brown came, examined, interrogated, pondered, and finally declared that the mischief was not beyond repair; and that steady perseverance in such remedial measures as he should indicate, would probably enable the patient in a few years to resume his ordinary habits of life.

To understand the transports of delight and gratitude with which this guarded announcement was received, it must be remembered that Hyacinth believed himself doomed to a lifelong imprisonment, with no prospect of release except by the stroke which snaps all chains. In comparison with this, the "few years" of confinement now imposed upon him appeared to fill no appreciable space in the vista of futurity. Setting their number at five, he would then be only thirty; and much as he might have deplored such a gap in the best part of existence, had that been the term originally fixed, he welcomed it now as a most gracious reprieve, and

was gladdened by the reflection that he should not have survived the powers of enjoying liberty before the hour of his deliverance arrived. That awful word—never!—being erased from his sentence, no definite period seemed long. It was not deemed prudent to tell him the good news all at once, for fear of upsetting his fortitude; but Anna could not keep the secret beyond a day, and as Hyacinth bore it with tolerable equanimity, Mr. Weston had no great reason to grumble.

It was a real grief to the worthy doctor when the time came for the removal of a patient in whom he had taken so lively an interest. Mrs. Leycester was anxious to get Hyacinth home, where he could be under the eye of his physician, and find better accommodation than in his present abode. She thought, too, that change of scene would help to banish the painful souvenirs that must beset him in Ashby St. Martin. As soon, therefore, as he was strong enough to bear the journey, she prepared to depart. A proper reclining couch was obtained, which could be slanted up or down at pleasure, and on which he could be conveyed anywhere, without changing his position, or jarring his nerves.

"Is there anything you wish done before we leave here, dearest?" asked Anna. "Any property to be redeemed, or debts paid, or kindness shown you to be rewarded?"

"There was a puppy I had adopted," answered Hyacinth, after reflection. "One of Riddell's people kindly took charge of the orphan when I was laid up; I daresay he will gladly surrender it, on receipt of a small consideration."

"What was his name?"

"Ben mio."

"No, no, I mean the man's name, not the dog's."

"He was called Richard; I don't know his other name, or where he lived, but you can easily find out at the yard. He is married, so you can negotiate with the lady, if you prefer it, or if he should be out of the way."

"Was she attentive to you during your illness?" enquired Anna, who thought this might be merely a delicate method of recompensing services rendered him.

"Devil a bit!" was the laconic response. "It was no fault of hers, I believe," added he, in mitigation. "Her husband had some fancy that—that she would have liked to come, in short; so he would not let her."

"Oh, Hyacinth!" ejaculated Mrs. Leycester, shaking her head incredulously.

"*Ma chérie*, I vow I never saw the girl but once, in the street. It was purely a measure of prevention on Richard's part. Barring his absurd jealousies, however, he is not a bad fellow, and a little present, in the shape of payment for the animal's keep, will not be thrown away."

Mrs. Leycester undertook the errand, coupling with it one of her own, which she did not think it necessary to mention to her husband. She had a curiosity to see the place where he had lived, and got Mr. Weston to accompany her thither.

"What sort of person is the landlady?" asked she, as they were on the road. "There is nothing owing to her, as far as I can ascertain, except a few shillings for rent. Can I offer her money in return for her good offices, or would a less direct mode of recompense be more acceptable?"

"I should be sorry to stand between her and luck," replied Mr. Weston, "but I must say that in my opinion a very trifling amount of remuneration will meet the justice of the case."



Some extra trouble, no doubt, was entailed upon Mrs. Crossley by her lodger's affliction; but she certainly did as little as she could help. How she could shut her heart against the compassion that finds so ready a response in female breasts, when the sufferer, too, possessed every attribute calculated to excite her womanly sympathies—youth, good looks, friendlessness, grievous infirmity, touching patience, and gentleness—was always a mystery to me. I have reason to fear she often neglected him cruelly; and her last step, in consigning him to the tender mercies of the parochial board, invalidates, I think, any claim she might have had upon your liberality. An appeal to the law sets aside all private arrangements. Since she confined herself so strictly within the limits of her duty, let equally strict justice be dispensed to her."

"One must not be too parsimonious in one's liberality," said Anna smiling. "The poor woman's mind was perhaps narrowed by her circumstances; she could not afford to do more."

"You have stated the very essence of my complaint against her," rejoined Mr. Weston. "Had she shown a generous spirit, she would deserve to be generously rewarded, without re-

ference to the exact value of her services. 'She hath done what she could,' is one of the highest commendations ever pronounced upon a woman. It does not apply to Mrs. Crossley."

Sorely vexed was that prudent dame when she discovered what she had lost by an over-zealous regard to her own interests. Here was her peniless inmate claimed by a wealthy lady, who stood with moist eyes by the humble couch where he had lain, and would doubtless, had she found him there, have showered gold with both hands upon his kind nurse and hospitable entertainer! It was too provoking to think that she should have turned him out of doors just as his friends were coming to the rescue; such a proceeding would not place her before them in a very amiable light. Mr. Weston had disapproved it strongly, and of course would not say much in her favour. She was not hypocrite enough to beslaver Mrs. Leycester with fulsome professions of regard which her actions had belied; but after showing the visitors up-stairs, sat grimly by her fireside, counting the chickens that might have been hatched. Solomon, she was fain to admit, was not so far wrong as she had thought him, when he said: "There is that

withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."

Her expectations being thus reduced to the lowest pitch, she was rather agreeably surprised when Anna, after satisfying her claim for rent, &c., proposed to add something for "attendance." On receiving the money, she attempted some sort of vindication of her conduct, but it was a very feeble one, amounting in substance simply to this: "I was obliged to take care of myself;" to which Mrs. Leycester could only reply, "Undoubtedly," and there was an end of the matter.

Mr. Weston could not resist stopping behind a moment to say: "You see, Mrs. Crossley, you would have been no loser by benevolence. What you lent to the Lord, would soon have been repaid with interest."

"Ah! but how could I tell that, sir?" objected the widow.

"Is not God's own word sufficient security?" returned Mr. Weston, and went his way, revolving a remark of De Custine's, that "Virtue would lose its perfection, and become a matter of mercenary calculation, if it were sure of always being appreciated and remunerated upon earth."

Without being unduly greedy of gain, the worthy doctor did wonder a little that, among all the outstanding debts called in and discharged, he was not invited to furnish his account. He neither expected nor desired more than the regular payment for his professional attendance, but no allusion was made to the subject, and he hesitated to notice what was no doubt an oversight. He made out his bill, however, and glancing at the pile of similar documents addressed to himself, put it in his pocket when he drove to the station to see the Leycesters off.

"Don't you take the nurse?" he asked of Anna, not perceiving that functionary.

"No," answered she, "Mr. Leycester ought to have a male attendant, and I have re-engaged his former valet, who was much attached to him. He is to meet us in London, so I thought Ford and I were quite able to take care of our invalid during the journey."

After a minute's pause, she proceeded in a less assured voice: "We have said nothing about repaying your services, Mr. Weston, because we really feel them to be beyond all price. In offering you this trifle, we beg you to consider it simply as an earnest of our gratitude, and

not in any way as a settlement of your claims. We hope not to lose sight of you entirely, and you cannot do us a greater favour than to point out to us, at any time, how we can oblige you."

She presented him with a sealed paper, and stepped into the carriage. Hyacinth wrung his hand, strove to utter a few parting words, and broke down in the attempt. The train moved on, slowly at first, like the early years of childhood, then rapidly, yet with scarcely perceptible motion, like the mid-career of life. Mr. Weston watched it out of sight, and then opened the envelope he held. It contained a cheque for £500.

The excellent doctor felt himself no longer a poor man, for the sting of poverty consists, not in being obliged to work hard and live simply, not in the inability to make a figure in the world, and indulge one's tastes and caprices; but in that anxiety for the morrow from which the most advanced Christians are seldom wholly free, that habitual dread that the means will not meet the liabilities, that imperative necessity of counting every penny expended, lest even in works of charity the will should outrun the power, and justice be overlooked by generosity. Mr. Wes-

ton exulted in the thought that, with these five hundred pounds in store, not only would creditors cease to scare him, but that many an indigent family would be the richer, while his kind heart would be less often torn by witnessing misery to which he could only afford partial relief.

Nor was this the sole benefit he derived from his connexion with the Leycesters; baskets of game, fruit, or fish were continually arriving; Hyacinth sent him a valuable gold watch; numerous additions were made to his library; and when he had occasion to go up to town for a couple of days, and intimated his intention of calling to satisfy himself personally of his late patient's improved health, he was compelled to take up his quarters in Park Lane, and made much of in every possible way.

Until he saw Hyacinth in his own house, Mr. Weston had not fully estimated the depth of the abyss from which he had mainly contributed to rescue him. It was now June. The young man lay at the drawing room window, on the narrow couch which he never quitted. It was now set upon wheels, well fitted with mattress and pillows, but the bed-like appearance was

modified by a coverlid of quilted silk, and as far as could be seen, he was dressed with his wonted precision and elegance. His hair and beard were curled and perfumed as of yore; a rose-coloured ribbon encircled his throat; the loose sleeves of his jacket were lined with silk of the same hue; his studs and wrist buttons were of costly enamel. Ben mio was comfortably established on his feet. The spacious and richly-furnished apartment was fragrant with flowers. A small table within his reach was loaded with books and periodicals, and a string attached to the bell enabled him to summon a troop of attentive servants, who waited on him with affectionate assiduity. Anna scarcely ever left him, and was ready to read, sing, or talk, play cards or chess, or do anything else that could procure him a moment's pleasure.

"I want to carry him into the country," she said to Mr. Weston, "it would do him so much good to get out into the open air now and then."

"What prevents his doing so here?" asked the doctor. "There's a beautiful Park just in front of you."

"He would not like the publicity of it," an-

swered Anna. "So well known as he is in London, he would be mobbed by curious enquirers; and he is not yet sufficiently familiar with his infirmity, to bear with indifference the notice it would excite. Now, at our little place in Kent, he could be wheeled out of the sitting-room windows upon the lawn, or driven about the grounds without any one to stare at him, or ask troublesome questions. I was afraid to remove him earlier; but Dr. Brown thinks he may soon dispense with such frequent visits; and Hildhurst is not so far from town as to make it inconvenient for him to run down occasionally."

Mr. Weston's wonder grew at every word she spoke. The owner of a country-house and grounds, besides this princely residence (for thus it appeared to him), a man so well-known, and as might be inferred, so popular that he could not venture out for fear of being mobbed, in danger of perishing by starvation in a humble lodging, or dying still more ignominiously under a workhouse roof! It was a reverse of fortune he would have pronounced incredible had he read it in the pages of a novel; and much did he marvel what combination of circumstances could have led to so disastrous a result.



Hyacinth gave him some insight into the mystery, alleging the not altogether ill-founded jealousy of his wife as the reason of their separation, and taking all the blame to himself.

It was difficult, however, to make a third person comprehend very clearly proceedings which, now that the mists of error and passion were swept away, did not appear particularly rational to the actors themselves. Hyacinth never could understand how, loving him as she indisputably did, and not being a woman of violent temper, Anna could have made up her mind so suddenly to abandon him; while she was equally at a loss to conceive why he should have allowed himself to be reduced to such an extremity; and besides marvelling at each other, both were troubled to account for their own conduct in the affair. The reasons which had seemed so strong to their excited fancy, looked woefully insufficient to satisfy a dispassionate critic; perceiving which, they tacitly agreed to abstain from any attempt at explanation, leaving the curious to put their own solution on the enigma.

With Leicester's own family, this course was easy enough. They knew that he and his wife

had quarreled; they were welcome to know that a reconciliation had been effected; minute details of the *dénouement* could hardly be demanded by those who had troubled themselves so little about the progress of the affair.

The story current in his household was that Master had met with a dreadful accident out hunting, and not being able to give any account of himself, was carried to the infirmary of the nearest parish, where he was found by Missis, who heard of the catastrophe as she was passing through the town. These were in reality the broad facts of the case, and hung together with so much coherence that the intermediate links were not missed. The lady's maid herself never knew how long Hyacinth had been in Ashby before he was discovered there.

The world without regarded the affair with temperate curiosity, combined with good-natured indifference. There had been a little misunderstanding in the Leycester *ménage*, said Report; and the house was shut up for two seasons, which was a pity. But the waves of society soon close over such wrecks, and flow smoothly as before. The second summer, no one asked, Where are they? The ladies found a new

darling; the aspirants to distinction adopted another model; Mrs. Fitzmaurice was not inconsolable; Lord Wells reigned supreme. War broke out; and the Coventry Club broke up; a military fever raged in all circles, and no man, no book, no picture, no song excited a particle of interest unless stamped with the magic word—Crimea! To do justice, however, to Society, it is generally ready enough to acknowledge its favorites, when recalled to its recollection. Some sensation was created even in the Arctic circle of Fashion when Hyacinth re-appeared on the scene.

“Whom do you think I saw at Folkestone the other day, when I landed from France?” asked Mr. Sinclair of a select coterie. “Cinthy Leicester, *and* his wife.”

“Ah! I was told he had turned up again,” said Dacre.

“I was so astonished, I could scarcely credit my eyes,” continued Sinclair. “There they were in a pony-phaeton, she driving.”

“Oh! she had the reins this time, had she?” observed Dacre, parenthetically.

Sinclair went on: “‘Why, Cinthy, my man, is that you, or your ghost?’ cried I, going up to

him. 'Well,' said he, 'I believe it is myself,' Sinclair. I have heard of spectres on horse-back, but never of a ghost in a four-wheeled chaise!' Mrs. Leycester sat smiling by. How the deuce did they come together again, I should like to know!"

"Pity did it, I fancy," said Captain Lawrence. "Those adorable torments of our lives cannot withstand the sight of physical suffering. A jealous woman would stick a knife into you without the least hesitation; but, if it did not kill you on the spot, she would bandage you up tenderly, and nurse you with the greatest care."

"They say Leycester is a wretched object,—quite crippled," remarked Lord Wells, pulling up his shirt collar.

"Why, what is supposed to be the matter with him?" asked Sinclair, in surprise. "I noticed no falling off in his personal appearance. His complexion was as brilliant as ever, his *mise* as *soignée*; he held out a delicately-gloved hand that I was half ashamed to take in my seafaring paw, and invited me to go and see him, which I was sorry I had not time to do."

"I understood he had a spinal complaint,"

persisted Lord Wells, "and never stirred off a flat board "

"Indeed! Now I recollect, he was stretched out at full length in the carriage, but I thought that was just his lazy way. What brought him to that plight?"

"A spill out hunting," answered Lawrance. "Horse flung him across a rail, and fell back upon him."

"It was not the duel then?"

"Oh! no. I saw him after that, and the wound was a very superficial one; not near the spine."

"That story about the mishap with hounds is all very well for those who like to believe it," said Lord Wells, mysteriously; "but there is another version of the affair in well-informed quarters. The report is that Master Cinthy had got a woman shut up in his apartments, which Mrs. Leycester suspecting, insisted on going down to see. He stood at the head of the stairs to prevent her, and in the tussle, she gave him an awkward push, which threw him off his balance and sent him right down the whole flight. His back was broken, or at least irremediably damaged by the fall. She shut up the

house, and hid him away for a long while to prevent the fact being known, and now produces him with a plausible story about fences in Leicestershire!"

"He certainly has not been heard of at Melton this year or two past," said Lawrance, on reflection.

"I wonder which of these accounts is the true one. You ought to know, Etheredge," said Sinclair.

"Upon my word I can't pronounce with authority," replied he. "As you are aware, I was abroad when these things happened, and knew nothing except from hearsay, like yourselves. We were positively told that the Leycesters had separated; but on what exact grounds they parted, and how, when, or where they made it up again, we have never been able to ascertain. These are questions one cannot ask of the parties themselves, and no one else perhaps is likely to be correctly informed."

"Do you believe that tale of Wells's?" asked Etheredge of Dacre as they walked away together. "All things considered, it does not sound so improbable."

"It's a fiction for all that," answered Dacre.

"The dispute *was* about a woman; but that, I undertake to assert, is the only part of the narrative founded on fact. I met Leycester in town safe and sound, some time after the alleged date of the battle on the stairs; and as to her keeping him *au secret* all this while, she did not so much as know where he was last winter, for she wrote to me to enquire."

"Then why did you not contradict that absurd report?" exclaimed Etheredge, stopping short in the street, as if with a view to return.

"Why should I, my dear fellow?" replied Dacre, leading him quietly forward; "people always prefer a good story to a true one. Besides, if the hero ever comes among us again, the interest of such an adventure, will make up for any disfigurement he may have sustained. A reputation for wickedness is a more potent charm with most women than either youth or beauty."

"As you know by experience, old boy," said Etheredge, laughing.

Dacre looked furtively at him, to see in what sense the rather dubious compliment was to be taken; but there was little to be gathered from the young lord's ingenuous countenance, so he held his peace.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“Happy is your grace,  
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune  
Into so quiet and so sweet a style.”

AS YOU LIKE IT.

WHATEVER the cause, Hyacinth found himself the rage when he ventured to show in town. He was considered to look very interesting in his recumbent position, his carriage was surrounded when he drove in the Park ; and as it was impossible for him to go to them, ladies came in crowds to call upon him, and enliven his seclusion. They brought the prettiest *débutantes* of the season to make his acquaintance, and kept him *au fait* of all the current gossip. Men came, a few out of regard for him, more because the women went ; so that his drawing-room became a favorite lounge, both in the afternoon and of an evening, when people, sure of finding him at home, dropped in for an hour on their way to a ball,



or from a dinner party, and took a cup of coffee or an ice.

Mrs. Leycester was delighted to be thus assisted in lightening the tedium of his confinement. She would have been glad to fill their country house with visitors for the same purpose: but this was not so easy. The guests themselves required entertaining there, and it would tantalize the invalid to hear of out-door pursuits in which he could take no share. Their rural society was therefore limited to a few intimate friends, gentlemen often taking a bed there on their road to and from hunting and shooting stations in the neighbourhood. These helped to save him from utter stagnation, and as an additional resource, Anna persuaded him to improve a natural taste for painting, which carried him through many a quiet hour.

The one great drawback upon Anna's enjoyment of the months passed at Hildhurst, proceeded from what had so lately formed her chief consolation, viz., the presence of her adopted child. She had not forgotten him all this while, though on the discovery of her husband, the lesser interest naturally merged in the greater. Even when her first fears for him had subsided,

she was satisfied with knowing that Jasmine was well cared for, and thriving nicely; and troubled herself with no further speculations concerning him. Not until she actually arrived at Hildhurst with her invalid husband, did she begin to perceive the embarrassments connected with her infant charge. How would Mr. Leycester view the intruder? Would he recognise the child? and if he did, would he be pleased or annoyed at her interference on its behalf.

In utter inability even to guess his probable sentiments, she judged it best to keep the boy out of sight, a precaution easily observed, as Hyacinth was confined to one or two rooms, and the mansion was not so small that noise in the nursery was necessarily audible throughout. She could regulate his hours of exercise so that there should be no chance of collision out of doors; and interdict that portion of the grounds that was visible from the sitting-room windows. But as Jasmine grew strong on his legs and in his will, the difficulty increased of preventing his eluding his nurse's vigilance, and making an irruption into any part of the domain that seemed good to him. Would he always be contented to see "godmamma" at such time and

what he might appoint, and not rush after  
 as told that fatal inopportune which be-  
 long to an earlier arrival, into the presence he  
 should avoid through precipitating explanations,  
 and through observing his own future.

He had not any reasons to be incurred;  
 he had no more considerations. Hyacinth's peace  
 must be restored. Anna had wept over his mis-  
 fortune, and she had said that he should have  
 done as she would have done.

Anna of course could not, was a penance she  
 must pay, and she must take place; it had  
 been so long since she had been old enough to  
 do so, and she had been so long.

There was a  
 great deal of work to be done, and was  
 a great deal of work to be done, and was  
 a great deal of work to be done, and was

in the evening, con-  
 siderable work to be done, and was  
 a great deal of work to be done, and was

with which Hyacinth had  
 been accustomed to do, and was  
 a great deal of work to be done, and was

good nature, his friends imagined the handsome trifter as destitute of intellectual resources, as incapable of calm resignation, and wondered to find him neither fretful, nor gloomy, nor dull. This was an amazing relief to his visitors, who could approach him without long faces or studied condolence, and did not therefore dread what they admitted to be a social duty. Far from inviting condolence, Hyacinth always discouraged the idea of his being a victim, and seemed fully disposed to enjoy all the good that was to be extracted from his condition, instead of dwelling perpetually upon its inevitable disadvantages. To an indolent man, he declared, it was no such mighty penance to contemplate the world from a reclining-board.

"After all, my dear Anna, things might have been far worse," argued he one day, when she had been deploring his wasted youth. "Suppose, for instance, I had caught the small-pox, and been left with a complexion like a gravel walk?"

"Incorrigible coxcomb!" cried Anna, stroking his cheek. "You don't mean to say you value this peach-like texture more than strength and freedom, and all the active enjoyments of life?"

"It is not mere coxcombry," returned he. "My good looks are my sole capital; their loss would make me bankrupt. What did you yourself, O wise woman, ever see in me to love, except this same comeliness you now affect to despise?"

"Oh, Cinthy! I, as well as others, might have been originally attracted by a fair outside; but you have within you far more enduring claims to esteem and admiration."

A half-incredulous smile curved Hyacinth's lip.

"I hope," he said, "people will always look at me before they look into me. If I have any internal merits at all, they are of your own planting, Carina."

Had Hyacinth been cut off in the midst of his career of dissipation, and suddenly reduced to his present plight, it is probable he would have exhibited less patience under the misfortune; but in comparison with the fate that at one period threatened him, his life now seemed crowded with blessings; he not only refrained from murmuring, but sent up a continual incense of praise to Heaven for the mercy extended to him.

There were times when he was not sorry to be alone. His mercurial temperament revived to a great extent as soon as the heavy pressure of adversity was withdrawn: but his spirits were unequal, and not always capable of sustaining the easy flow of drawing-room conversation. Recollections of recent misery, the sting of which was not yet wholly exhausted, would now and then obtrude upon his most festive hours. The contrast, indeed, was seen from its bright side, and suggestive only of comforting ideas; but it was a change to be remembered in silence, with deep humility and thankfulness.

Anna was pleased to find that the serious impressions born of sorrow, did not vanish at the first contact with the gay and unthinking world. He did not always wear a solemn face, nor confine his attention solely to grave subjects, but these had their turn; his mind was evidently at work in the right direction, and Anna was content to protect and cherish its spontaneous growth, instead of attempting to force it into premature, and perhaps short-lived maturity. She was not discouraged if he seemed to slip back one day from the height he had gained on

the preceding; such alternations, she knew, were to be expected from human nature, which, like the tide, does not really progress at a bound, but advances by scarcely perceptible degrees, receding many a time from the point it is ultimately destined to reach.

Neither did she weary him with long theological and ethical discourses, preferring to cast in a seed here and there, as opportunity offered. Without compromising what she believed to be the truth, she was careful to present it in such a form as should awaken least opposition, and commend it most surely to a male understanding. An error most women commit in carrying on religious arguments is, to rely too much on authority, expecting from their antagonist that reverence for certain names, statements, and subjects in which they have happily been trained; if, as must occur, these matters are called in question, or unceremoniously handled, forthwith they are shocked, and retire in dismay, leaving their opponent, as he thinks, in possession of the field, or confirming him in his belief that female piety is mere superstition, a sentiment for which no rational grounds can be assigned, a system invented to subjugate weak in-

tellects, from which it is a man's glory to keep himself free.

Mrs. Leycester had thoroughly studied the character with which she had to deal, and followed it through all its windings with inexhaustible patience and ready skill, never starting at a doubt, nor leaving an objection unanswered; above all, never pressing a victory so far as to carry bitterness as well as conviction into the vanquished disputant's breast. She avoided importing the personal element into such discussions, thinking it better Hyacinth should make a private application of the general principles enunciated; but he was rather fond of introducing his own case, partly, no doubt, because it had an actual interest for him, partly from unconscious egotism, and partly also from a mischievous pleasure in trying how far she would modify the strictness of her views to excuse his conduct. She made a better apology for him; he declared, than he should have invented for himself; not that his ingenuity was at all at a loss in finding means of self-justification. He would freely admit his misdeeds one minute, and then demonstrate with great eagerness why it was impossible for him to have acted other-



wise. As a Frenchman thinks he has given a satisfactory answer to every imputation against his habits or temper, by saying, "*C'est mon caractère ; que voulez vous ? je suis fait comme cela ;*" so Leycester, while deploring his weakness, was always ready to prove himself the victim of circumstances.

"I should not have been made as I was, if I had been intended for a hermit," was a favorite plea, to which the example of Joseph never seemed a sufficient reply. "The women threw themselves into my arms; what could I do?"

"You should have kept them shut," Mrs. Leycester would reply. "There is no virtue where there is no temptation."

"Is that an invariable rule?" asked he, maliciously.

"You must not confound virtue with innocence," was the quiet response. "Eve was simply innocent till the tempter came; had she resisted, she would have been virtuous."

While, however, Mrs. Leycester noted with rejoicing his growing relish for higher things, and suffered him to disentangle himself gradually from many an error, there were some

who deemed her method inexpedient, and believed it a total failure. Of this number was Mary Wentworth, who, gleaning from divers expressions her aunt let fall, that Hyacinth had taken a religious turn, expected to find him a different individual altogether. Whether she imagined his hair would have ceased to curl, is a question: she certainly was disappointed to see him as fastidious as ever about the minutiae of the toilet, and to hear him still discuss light topics in a light tone, instead of holding forth in a strain of edifying solemnity.

One day, much excitement was created in the household by the discovery that the gardener, a respectable-looking elderly man, had gone off with a young woman in the village, leaving a disconsolate wife unprovided for, and a large assortment of children.

"What an old villain!" cried Hyacinth, when it came to his ears. "The lower orders are growing fearfully demoralised. A marquis could not have behaved worse. Really, if this sort of thing gains ground, gentlemen will be forced to live soberly with their lawful spouses, if only by way of distinction. Why do you shake your head, Miss Wentworth? I thought that was a

moral sentiment that would have met your unqualified approval."

Mary could not refuse him a smile as she replied :

" You have such a singular way of distorting ideas, that you make even moral sentiments sound wrong."

" How discouraging!" cried he. " Come, Anna, take up my defence."

" There is some sense in Cinthy's nonsense," said that lady, always ready to do battle on his behalf. " If certain vices could once be divested of the aristocratic prestige that surrounds them, they would soon fall into merited disrepute, and diminish in frequency."

" But if people had no higher motive for becoming virtuous, than that vice was unfashionable, how much would society be the better for such external decorum?" asked Mary, triumphantly.

" Goodness is always good," returned Anna, after a moment's reflection. " By cultivating the soil, we insensibly improve the atmosphere. Cherish a respect for decency and order, and you will develop better qualities, or at least give scope for their exercise. If you require an

illustration of this truth, look at its converse. Let a man, a nation, once break loose from conventional rules of conduct, and they are easily led into the wildest excesses. When the lawless spirit is introduced, he that offends in one point wants only opportunity to be guilty of all."

"Do you really think so, Anna?" asked Hye-einth, with unwonted gravity. "Surely it does not follow that because I have . . . have broken one of the commandments therefore I should steal, or stain my hands with blood?"

There was a slight hesitation in his voice as he pronounced the last words; the frequent connexion between one crime and another suddenly flashed upon his conscience.

"It does not follow," replied Mrs. Leycester, "because your disposition, or your circumstances may not lead you in those directions; but by deliberately transgressing one injunction, you show your contempt for the law as plainly as if you broke them all."

"Then you hold every one, who is not perfect, equally guilty?" said Mary.

"Nay, there are degrees of guilt, as there are shades of the same colour. Only I fancy that sinners are more on a level in the sight of

Heaven than we are apt to imagine; if, indeed those of deeper dye are not in more hopeful case than the rest, since the very enormity of their wickedness is likely to rouse them to a more earnest repentance. 'To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.'"

"But is not that holding out a premium to crime?"

"It is a specific against despair, and a warning against presumption," said Anna, impressively. "We need to remember that 'many that are last shall be first, and the first last.'"

"There!" exclaimed Hyacinth. "So don't you be too hard, Miss Mary, upon a poor wretch like me, who was never taught better, and have to grope my way to the light as well as I can."

Mary was fain to admit that Hyacinth displayed some virtues for which she had not given him credit; his cheerful patience could not have been surpassed by a professed saint, and he did not take every attention paid him as a matter of course. His readiness to be amused, his delicate consideration for others, combined with the personal niceties which she thought superfluous, rendered him an invalid whom even Charles Lamb, with his declared hatred of sick people,

might have tolerated. His chief fault in her eyes just now was a tendency to fall asleep when she was reading aloud. If he kept awake, however, dissension was sure to arise, for he had a perverse inclination to admire the wrong books and the wrong people in them, and could not be wrought up to a proper pitch of sentiment by any means whatsoever. Not all the pathos of Mary's favorite "Heir of Redclyffe" could disarm his critical propensity.

"Imagine an almost faultless being, an unfledged angel, like Sir Guy," he would say, "unable to die in peace without a passport from a feeble-minded young clergyman, not up to his work! It is just of a piece with his wanting to carry his bride on a wedding tour through those dreariest of places, our cathedral towns."

"Have you no reverence for any thing, place, or person?" Mary asked indignantly.

"Yes, Miss Mary, I hope I can revere what is venerable, wherever I meet with it. Reprobate as I am myself, I honour purity, moral courage, simple faith, genuine piety, in any shape that they may take, or have taken. But I don't bind myself to accept the husk with the wheat. A cathedral to me is unfortunately sug-

gestive of a dean and chapter; and when I recollect why numbers of men enter the Church, and how they behave in it, I cannot bring myself to bow down before them as a class, merely because they have gone through the ceremony of ordination."

"I never can get on with that niece of yours, Anna," he said to his wife in private. "She thinks me a heathen, and I think her—"

"What, Cinthy?" asked Mrs. Leycester, with some curiosity.

"Well, I consider her a very well-meaning girl, with a comfortable conviction of her own wisdom, virtue, and general ability. Why does not somebody marry her, and take the starch out of the young woman? Male companionship, has a wonderful effect in mitigating the ferocious good sense of your sex, ma belle."

"Indeed you do generally make fools of us, if we are not so by nature," said Anna, stroking the soft cheek of her instructor in the sublime folly of love.

END OF VOL. II.

IN ONE VOL., FOOLSCAP OCTAVO, PRICE 4s., CLOTH,

## GLAD TIDINGS.

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FROM "THE TIMES," NOV. 7TH.

When we say that the scene on which the actors in this little story move is laid at Athens, that the date of the action is the year 65 A.D., and that the chief personage in it is St. Paul, assisted by "Dionysius the Areopagite," and "a woman named Damaris," our readers will have no difficulty in guessing that this is a religious story, and that the "glad tidings" here announced relate to the preaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles on Mars' Hill. The question arises, why tell a story about a truth? Why embody in a work of fiction scenes so sacred as those described in the Acts of the Apostles? The answer is that there have been Tales before this in which characters more sacred than that of St. Paul have been brought upon the stage of fiction, and in which religious subjects have been handled with a freedom—nay, with a licence—of which there is not a trace in this little book. This is a religious book on a sacred subject, and its sole intention is to edify the Christian reader by imaginary examples of the faith and constancy which enabled the converts of the early ages to triumph over death itself.

But now another question arises—Is the subject well treated? Is it, so far as so slight a story can be, a work of art? We think it is. The plot is simple enough. Damaris mourns for Callias, her absent lover, and finds no comfort in prayers to any of the gods. There is a shipwreck off the Piræus, and in that ship are St. Paul and Callias, the author supposing, as we infer, that this was one of the occasions unrecorded in the Acts, but indicated in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the Apostle to the Gentiles endured the dangers of the deep. St. Paul saves the life of Callias after he has sustained the spirits of all on board by his faith; but the lover only reaches the shore to fall into a fever, and Damaris still mourns her lost Callias. The shipwrecked mariners noise the Apostle's fame throughout the city; then follows the scene on Mars' Hill and the rebuke of the superstitious worship of "the unknown god." Shortly after St. Paul meets Damaris by accident at the altar of that dark divinity, whither she had gone to pray, for she had heard that this, after all, was the true God. She reveals her grief, and after words of comfort she promises to see him again, and says her name is Damaris. "Damaris!" repeated the Apostle



"and he for whom thou would'st pray is named Callias; give me thy hand, and I will lead thee to him." Callias, of course, recovers, and thus the story goes on, the Apostle making converts among the seniors of the city, and among others Dionysius the Areopagite, besides especially instructing the youthful pair in Christian truth, and advising Damaris to lay aside her gay attire and plaiting of the hair, and to put on a garb becoming to a Christian woman.

On one occasion, when Damaris has been chosen to fill the chief place among the maidens of the city in the Pan-Athenaic procession, a tumult arises, because Damaris, chosen against her will, appears in homely dress, and refuses to take part in the idolatrous ceremony. The house in which the Apostle and his converts are living is surrounded by a mob, who accuse him of having obtained an influence over their minds by magic, and everything looks like Socrates and hemlock, if not a speedier death, when the Apostle exerts the magic of his Roman citizenship, and the mob slink off, awed by the presence of a few Roman legionaries.

So things progress, and Callias and Damaris, the Christian pair, might have been united by Christian rites, instead of heathen ceremonies; but that the course of true love should run smooth is not to be expected, least of all in a religious tale, and so Callias is assassinated by Alexander the Coppersmith—of whom, we may remark, from the Second Epistle to Timothy, that we should rather have expected to find him at Ephesus than at Athens—but who, wherever he abode, seems, like Demetrius of Ephesus, to have driven a good trade in shrines, and who had just lost an order through the interference of the young Christian.

The loss of Callias is naturally a great blow to Damaris, but Christianity and the Apostle enable her to bear up under her affliction. And now the story hastens to a close. Alexander is tried solemnly for the murder and escapes, inasmuch as he had slain an enemy of the gods. The Apostle's work is over in Athens, and, after a solemn warning to the idolatrous authorities, he shakes off the dust of Athens from his feet, and departs for Asia with his convert Damaris, whom her friends vainly endeavour to divert from her purpose.

The little Tale is good in tone and keeping, and a few inconsistencies which it presents to the deeply read classical scholar are not such as to spoil its effect on the general public. If it should edify any among the careless herd of "babblers" in this generation "who spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing," we imagine that the purpose of the author will be amply fulfilled.

